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THE SILENT SUFFERER.

In His great passion our Savior endured unspeakable agony, but rarely spoke. When He did open His mouth, it was to pray to His Heavenly Father, to warn and comfort His friends, to bear testimony to the truth, or to make intercession for His enemies. He began His suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane on Thursday evening, and ended it on the cross in the late afternoon of the next day. During these long hours He submitted to cruel and inhuman treatment without one word of resentment or complaint. He heard the taunts and jeers; and the false accusations of His enemies, and said nothing. "Neither was guile found in His mouth: who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not." 1 Pet. 2, 22. 23. It even happened that He positively refused to speak. Although Christ spoke on certain occasions, still He appears throughout His great passion as the Silent Sufferer.

The silence of Jesus is most remarkable. It is very unusual. Why did He suffer in silence? How shall we be benefited by it? Let us study this aspect of Christ's suffering.

Christ was silent because His silence was foretold by the prophets. "The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," John 1, 29, must by His silence resemble the lamb of the Mosaic sacrifice, which was dumb when it was brought to the slaughter. The Messiah must not only be "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," but also a man of silence. He must bear His intense torture without complaint. He must not cry, nor bewail His hard lot. He must not revile those that revile

Him. In silence He must submit to abuse. Ignominy and disgrace shall be heaped upon Him, but He must keep the peace. He cannot plead with His oppressors. He cannot even whisper His innocence, much less demand justice. The Old Testament faithful had to expect a Savior who would redeem them by silent suffering. Isaiah said, chap. 53, 7: "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth." This is silence indeed. And when Jesus was about to enter upon His great passion, He said to His disciples: "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished." Luke 18, 31. Not one detail of any prophecy shall be neglected, not even the silence of which Isaiah speaks. This, too, He intends to observe conscientiously and consistently. How did Jesus do it?

Before the council of the chief priests and elders appeared many false witnesses, who witnessed against Jesus, but He said nothing in reply to their lying testimony. We might expect at least that He would deny their statements as lies. Even when the high priest arose and directly asked, "Answerest Thou nothing? What is it which these witness against Thee?" Jesus "held His peace." His only statement was that He is the Son of God. Then, when they spat in His face, and buffeted Him, and smote Him with the palms of their hands, when they covered His face, and struck Him, and asked Him to prophesy who it was that struck Him, He never said one word nor uttered one cry. He endured this villainy in deep silence. Matt. 26, 60—63.

Pontius Pilate marveled at the silence of Jesus. As a judge of the Roman Empire he had tried many cases, but never one like this. By long experience he was accustomed to hear the charge brought against the prisoner by the prosecution and then the plea of the defense. He was trained not to let his mind be influenced either by the vehemence of the prosecution, or by the fiery and impassioned reply of the

prisoner. It was his duty to render judgment according to the testimony brought before him, and to render it impartially. Here he had heard the accusation and expected an indignant denial. He heard only the calm statement that Christ's kingdom is not of this world. "And when Jesus was accused of the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing. Then said Pilate unto Him, Hearest Thou not how many things they witness against Thee? And He answered him to never a word, insomuch that the governor marveled greatly." Matt. 27, 12—14. Pilate cannot understand this persistent silence of Jesus. A long while after this examination, Pilate "went again into the judgment-hall and saith unto Jesus, Whence art Thou? But Jesus gave him no answer. Then saith Pilate unto Him, Speakest Thou not unto me? Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and have power to release Thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above; therefore, he that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin." John 19, 9—11. We see that Jesus remained silent to Pilate's question, and in plain words told him that He will continue to be silent, except power were given Pilate from above to force Him to speak. As before the ecclesiastic court He appeared in silence, so also here before the civil court. Furthermore He received the crown of thorns, the mock homage of the soldiers, the scourging, and all other abuse without one murmur or sob. When the cry, "Crucify Him!" became more and more violent, and the people were incited to rave and rage against Him, He stood before Pilate and the multitude in perfect and immovable silence. Not one word did He speak in His own defense or in explanation of the charges against Him. Neither violence nor the hope of freedom moved Him to speak. Even hard-hearted Pilate marveled. It was a marvelous silence.

Because Pilate was anxious to rid himself of this disagreeable case, he gladly sent Jesus to King Herod when he heard that Jesus belonged under his jurisdiction. "And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad; and he hoped to

have seen some miracle done by Him. Then he questioned Him in many words; but He answered him nothing. And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him. And Herod with his men of war set Him at naught, and mocked Him, and arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him again to Pilate." Luke 23, 8—11. King Herod saw the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, but His lips were closed. In silence Jesus stood before Herod.

Thus the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled according to the letter as well as the spirit before the Jewish High Council, before Pilate, and before King Herod. Christ really appeared as the lamb, which is dumb at the slaughter. By suffering in silence, He proved that He actually is that Savior of whom God had spoken through His prophet. If, however, Christ had not kept the silence, this fact could be used against His claim that "all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished." Then there might be another name under heaven given among men whereby we could be saved. But this possibility is positively removed. The fact that Jesus was silent is expressly recorded. He is our Lord Jesus Christ also because of His silent suffering.

Christ's Silence Proved His Divine Majesty. He was tried before three different courts. He was accused of many things. Each court asked Him many questions. He answered whenever the question was proper, and then answered it correctly. In reality it was He who decided what ought to be asked and answered, and not the court before which He stood. There was no power that could move Him to speak when He was determined to be silent. Before this silence everybody appeared helpless. By this silence He carried out His own will.

In vain had the false witnesses appeared against Jesus in the court presided over by Caiaphas. In sheer despair to find a cause against this silent prisoner, Caiaphas finally asked Him whether He was the Christ. He received the affirmative answer in feigned horror and declared it to be blasphemy.

At once he demanded the death penalty, while Jesus, who easily could prove that He had spoken nothing but the truth, remained silent and submitted to this criminal verdict. In great haste and excitement this court adjourned, and ordered Jesus taken to Pilate to have their judgment confirmed and executed. It was the will of Jesus to die. He compelled the Jewish High Council to carry out His will, not because of what He had said, but because of His silence.

The trial before Pilate lasted hours and, with the interruptions omitted, took about this course. "Pilate called Jesus and said unto Him, Art Thou the King of the Jews? Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of Me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered Thee unto me: what hast Thou done? Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world; if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is My kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto Him, Art Thou a king, then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice. Pilate saith unto Him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews and saith unto them, I find in Him no fault at all." John 18, 33—38. And later on, "when He was accused of the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing. Then said Pilate unto Him, Hearest Thou not how many things they witness against Thee? And He answered him to never a word, insomuch that the governor marveled greatly." Matt. 27, 12—14. After the scourging and much fruitless argument with the Jews Pilate made a final attempt to get some kind of confession from Jesus. He asked Him, "Whence art Thou? But Jesus gave him no answer. Then saith Pilate unto Him, Speakest Thou not unto me? Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and have power to release Thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldst

have no power at all against Me except it were given thee from above; therefore, he that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin." John 19, 9—11. The proud Roman had received Jesus with disdain, and first treated Him with contempt. But this scorn soon turned into amazement, and this into fear. He knew that Jesus was innocent, and that the Jews had delivered Him for envy, but he could not compel his Prisoner to speak that word which would free Him. He had tried to persuade Him by seemingly kind words and he had used threats. All his attempts to make Him speak had failed. He felt helpless before his Prisoner. He had no desire to crucify Him. He had even tried to release Him. He washed his hands in water as a testimony to the fact that he was not guilty of the innocent death of Jesus. He feared that Jesus might be a king who could take dreadful vengeance on His tormentors. He had sneered when Jesus spoke, and now, when He was silent, he feared Him. The trial was evidently not progressing according to the will of Pilate, but according to the secret will of Him who stood before Pilate in awful silence. Jesus refused to free Himself by speaking. His silence kept Him in the power of the court. It was His will to die, and He compelled Pilate to do His will by His silence. Indeed, a divine, majestic silence!

As Pilate had failed before the silence of Jesus, so also did King Herod fail before it. At last Herod's desire to see Jesus was realized. Before him stood the man whose miracles and words had moved all Judea, yet never had come within the range of his eye or ear. He was delighted to see Him and have Him in his power. Now he could either protect Him against His unrelenting enemies, or help them to carry out their murderous intentions against Him. He condescended to appear friendly and hoped to gratify his curiosity, to see a miracle or hear some wonderful word. Easily Jesus might have gained Herod's good will. If the king would espouse His cause, the wicked priests would be helpless. But nothing could move Jesus to do one miracle or to speak one word.

This wounded Herod's pride, and his assumed friendliness turned into fury. He felt deeply humiliated and mortified. Pilate had sent Jesus to Herod to be tried by him; the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Jesus. But He never recognized Herod as His judge as He had recognized Pilate and the Jewish High Council. He permitted Herod to abuse Him, but not to condemn Him. Why did not Herod simply comply with the wish of the Jews and accommodate Pilate also? Who prevented him? He who was exercising His divine will in supreme silence. Truly a divine, majestic silence.

Furthermore Christ was silent because no more testimony was needed than that which He had already given. Pilate said: "I, having examined Him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse Him: no, nor yet Herod; for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto Him." Luke 23, 14. 15. Christ's innocence was evident to all. It was established even without denying the slanderous charges the Jews brought against Him. For envy they had delivered Him to Pilate. They simply would not let Him go. Malice and injustice were in league to destroy Him. But Jesus could not beg mercy of the wilfully malicious, or ask justice of the unjust, when they were intent upon being unjust. All further testimony and all appeals were therefore out of place. And so Christ was silent.

Christ's silence was a severe rebuke to His wicked tormentors. We noticed above that Pilate was afraid of Jesus. He feared that his innocent, scourged, and abused prisoner might be the Son of God. The words of Christ, "My kingdom is not of this world," still burned in his conscience. But he did not feel sorry for his wickedness and the injustice which he had done Jesus. He was not willing to face the hatred of the Jews, which they threatened if he should free Jesus. He was not willing to better himself. Still fear compelled him to ask Jesus, "Whence art Thou?" He would like to know what Jesus might do. If Jesus would hold out any hope that He could help him against the fanatical hatred of the

Jews, he would like to assure himself of this help. If, however, Jesus could not help him, then he was willing to do what the Jews demanded. Under these circumstances Jesus could do only one thing, namely, be silent. By not speaking to Pilate, He emphatically rebuked him. Christ's silence showed that Pilate's approaches deserved no answer at all. His silence showed that He was not willing to condone Pilate's injustice, or to excuse his vacillation and neglect of duty, or to put all blame for this unhappy trial on the hateful Jews. But how might not Pilate hope for just this, so as, in a measure, to ease his troubled conscience. But no, Jesus did not hold out any hope. He gave no comfort. All that the wicked behavior of Pilate, as well as that of the others, deserved, was silent rebuke. And a silent rebuke will often cut deeper than strong words can do. Therefore Jesus was silent.

Because Christ had gone into this suffering of His own free will, He was silent. Before ever there was one sinner, the salvation of the sinful world through the innocent suffering and death of the Son of God had been decided upon. From eternity Christ had been selected for this office. He had taken it upon Himself willingly. He had promised His heavenly Father to carry out this plan in time. For centuries this way to salvation had been preached by the prophets of God. Anxiously the children of God had waited for the arrival of Christ. They prayed that He might come and complete their salvation. Now the time had come. Jesus had entered upon His great suffering. He could not withdraw from it without breaking His own word. To plead His own innocence, to demand justice, to exclaim and protest against the manifold injustice, which He was suffering, would destroy His own plan. He had come to do the will of His Father, "whom it became . . . to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering." Heb. 2, 10. Willingly He submitted to all. He showed His willingness by suffering in silence.

Finally Christ was silent because He was guilty. No really guilty person dares to proclaim his innocence. When

our guilt is proved, we must be still. What can we say? And thus it was with Jesus. It is true, He was not guilty in His own person. For Himself He claimed perfect holiness. Even His detractors could not disprove it. But Jesus was "delivered for our offenses." Rom. 4, 25. "God hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin." 2 Cor. 5, 21. "God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law." Gal. 4, 4. 5. By way of the Law, that is, by keeping it and suffering the penalty for its violations, Christ was to redeem us. When He entered upon His work of redemption, the sin of the entire world rested upon Him. He went into the trial, with this burden. His earthly judges and executioners were only instruments in God's hands. They executed God's just punishment on Jesus. They helped to inflict on Jesus that punishment which the world deserved. Jesus pleaded guilty before His Father, our God. God accepted His plea. God received Him as the Guilty One, and punished Him accordingly. Standing before the highest tribunal in heaven, or on earth, or under the earth, before the just and holy God, with the sin of the whole world upon His shoulders, what else could Jesus do than be silent? Therefore He was silent.

The silence of Jesus was not accidental. It was not brought about by the exhaustion of His physical powers. It was not caused by terror, which might deprive its victim of the faculty of giving expression even to his fear. His silence was not forced on Him by any human agency or power. His silence was self-imposed. It was a part of His work of redemption. Not only by His words, or only by His acts, or only by His affliction, did He become our Redeemer, but also by His silence. Even by His silence He redeemed us.

He who suffered in silence kindly calls: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matt. 11, 28. He promises to relieve us of the burden of our guilt. He offers to exchange our sin for that righteousness in which we can stand before God. This righteousness He

wrought, and He only. Other righteousness there is not. Our own attempts at justification are eternal failures. He being raised for our justification remains our justification forever. His righteousness He offers as a free gift. He attaches no condition to His offer. He expects no gift in return. The Silent Sufferer says: "Come to Me; let me be your Savior, your Righteousness." He expects an answer. He anxiously awaits it. Shall our answer be a sinful, evil silence? O no! Our heart will not be still, and our mouth must not be mute.

Just as I am, and waiting not
 To rid my soul of one dark blot,
 To Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
 O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,
 Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
 Because Thy promise I believe,
 O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

For us to be silent would be fatal.

The kind invitation to come to Christ demands a prompt acceptance. The gracious voice of the Savior will again become silent. His invitation may be withdrawn at any time and will be withdrawn some time. Jesus Himself says so in a parable. "A certain man made a great supper and bade many." But when they refused to come, he said, "None of those men which were bidden shall taste my supper." Luke 14, 16—24. When the kind invitation was declined, the master withdrew it. The ungrateful guests missed the supper. Others were invited, came, and enjoyed the supper. After it was over, there were no more suppers and no more invitations. The master was silent. Even if the ungrateful guests now asked for an invitation, they received none. It was too late. The time to invite had passed; the time of silence was there. "Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, To-day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts." Heb. 3, 7—19. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked." Gal. 6, 7. To-day the gentle Savior is calling. But the time is coming when His lips shall be closed in silence. Then the despairing cry of the awakened conscience will not be able to open the sealed lips of grace.

There will be a terrible silence. A secure sinner may continue in sin and neglect the calling Savior. Satan, acting in the guise of an angel of light, will minimize sin and try to hush the voice of conscience. He will hold up a false hope. But finally he must act as the Prince of Darkness, and will arouse the sleeping conscience to boundless uneasiness. He will show his deluded victim all his sin in its most horrid form and point to its consequences: *God's* eternal damnation. Then the aroused and horrified sinner will call for help and grace. But there will be no answer. Jesus the Savior will speak no more. The Silent Sufferer will again be silent. Then Jesus the Judge will speak. Do not silence the gentle voice of the Savior by your own wicked silence.

Christ's silence is also an example which Christians will gladly follow. A Christian's life is one of daily and never-ending repentance. From the Law he learns how God accuses him of sin. The Christian does not try to excuse his sin, or explain it away, or make it less than God says it is. He fears God. He dares not to contradict God. He feels guilty. In silent shame he admits his guilt. As Christ pleaded guilty in silence, so also he. He regrets his sin, but has nothing else to offer God than the silent redemption of Jesus. On this he trusts implicitly. He prays to Christ to plead with His Father for him:

Rede durch dein Stilleschweigen,
Liebster Jesu, mir das Wort.

Such silence is acceptable to God.

After the same manner we must also face our brother in shameful silence when he admonishes us according to the Word of God. It is his duty to do it. It is our duty to hear him. Let us examine his accusation, and see what ground he has for it. When he brings a sin to our attention and warns us, we ought to thank our brother, for he is doing us a kindness. Receive the well-meant rebuke in silence. Promise by the help and grace of God to better yourself. To bring excuses and explanations may silence the brother, but not God, and will not produce a good conscience. Do not make countercharges

against the brother, for they will not justify you. Submit in silence to brotherly admonition.

On the other hand, silence on our part is a great sin when we do not reprove the erring brother. In Ezek. 3, 16—21 God says that He will demand the blood of the wicked from our hands if we do not warn him. By warning him we might save him. By being silent we confirm him in his wickedness. Now, Christ did not submit to silent suffering that through our silence one single soul should be lost, but rather that all should become partakers of His righteousness. Therefore beware of this sinful silence. This, however, does not mean that a Christian should be a mean faultfinder, an unpleasant, disagreeable person, one who sees nothing but evil in his neighbor. His corrections must proceed from the love of Christ and the love of his neighbor. Our aim must be to help our weak brother, not to tyrannize him.

Finally, a Christian will bear in patient silence adversity and the holy cross. The silently suffering Savior is ever before his eyes. He will practise silent submission to the inscrutable will of God in all hours. The path of his life may be rough and lead through darkness, but his silent Savior is at his side and gives him that peace which the world knows not. Oh, happy he who knows the Silent Sufferer!

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