



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean it is silent.

The Advent of Silence

God of Zion, to you even silence is praise.

Psalm 65:1a CEB

[When SILENCE is Praise]

Defining Silence:

SILENCE. (Heb. *hāsâ, hārash, dûmîyâ, dûmâ, dûmām*; Gr. *sigē, hēsuchia*).

Dûmâ is used only metaphorically: of Edom in **Isa 21:11**, “the oracle of Dumah” (lit. silence), having figurative reference to the desolation to fall upon Edom (Dumah);

Hush. Death. Hell. Refrain from speaking. Resigned in faith. Whisper. Rest. Wait.

¹ Freeman, H. E. (1975). [Silence](#). In C. F. Pfeiffer, H. F. Vos, & J. Rea (Eds.), *The Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*. Moody Press.

1747. דומייה *dûmiyyāh*, דומייה *dumiyyāh*: A feminine noun denoting silence, a quiet wait, in silence, rest. It indicates a time of silence in the sense of rest (Ps. 22:2[3]) or a self-imposed period of silence in the presence of evil persons (Ps. 39:2[3]). It may, on the other hand, indicate a time of reverential silence and patience as one waits for God (Ps. 62:1[2]) or a period of awesome silence in anticipation of praise to the Lord (Ps. 65:1[2]).
Ps 22:2-3; 39:2-3; 62:1-2; 65:1-2

1748. דומם *dûmām*: A masculine noun indicating silence, a quiet wait, in silence. It refers to a stone of silence or mute stone that is addressed by a deluded idolater (Hab. 2:19). It is used adverbially to refer to a person’s patient, silent waiting on the LORD (Lam. 3:26). It describes the silent, subdued state of a defeated Babylonian facing destruction (Isa. 47:5).¹

Absence of Noise. Stillness. Expectant. Reverence.

Complete absence of sound.

Similar: quietness; quiet; quietude; still; stillness; tranquility; noiselessness; soundlessness; peace; peacefulness

Silence removes:

Distractions

Our own voice

Worldly pursuits - puts in order of importance- organizing priorities

Natural. And Supernatural.

Silence opens:

Spiritual Truths

New ideas.

Ministry callings.

Relationship priorities.

Silence adds:

enrichment - natural n supernatural by revealing all priorities

Focus/Magnification

The voice of God

The meaning of scripture.

Renewal:

Our mind.

Our devotion to Christ.

A/DA Major portion of our devotions are silent: Waiting for the Lord..

¹ Baker, W., & Carpenter, E. E. (2003). In [The complete word study dictionary: Old Testament](#) (p. 230). AMG Publishers.



Biblical Concepts of Silence:

#1. SILENCE as Waiting: [When SILENCE means Wait.]

Isaiah 40:31

³¹ But those who [Ⓐ]wait on the Lord
 Shall renew their strength;
 They shall mount up with wings like eagles,
 They shall run and not be weary,
 They shall walk and not faint. **NKJV**

Lamentations 3:26

It is good that *one* should [Ⓐ]hope [Ⓑ]and wait quietly For the salvation of the Lord.**NKJV**

#2. SILENCE in Suffering: [When SILENCE unveils as Suffering] 12/11-12/17

- **Due to Life: Matthew 5:45b**

He makes the sun rise on both the evil and the good and sends rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous.
CEB

- **Due to the Free Will of Others: (Samaritan) Luke 10:30-37**

³⁰ Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among [Ⓐ]thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. ³³ But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ On the next day, [Ⓐ]when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' ³⁶ So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" ³⁷ And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."
NKJV

- **Due to the Fallen World: (Job) HCSB**

Job 35 CEB

Elihu continued:

² Do you think it right?

You say, "I'm more just than God."

³ Yet you ask, "What does it benefit you?

What have I gained by avoiding sin?"

⁴ I'll answer you,

and your friends along with you.

⁵ Look at the heavens and see;

scan the clouds high over you.

⁶ If you've sinned, how have you affected God?

Your offenses have multiplied;

what have you done to him?

⁷ If you are righteous,

what do you give to him?

Or what does he receive from your hand?

⁸ Your evil affects others like you,

and your righteousness affects fellow

human beings.

⁹ People cry out because of heavy oppression;



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

shout under the power of the mighty.
¹⁰ But no one says, "Where is God my maker;
 who gives songs in the night;
¹¹ who teaches us more than the beasts of
 the earth,
 makes us wiser than the birds in the sky?"
¹² Then they cry out; but he doesn't answer,
 because of the pride of the wicked.
¹³ God certainly doesn't respond to a deceitful cry;
 the Almighty doesn't pay attention to it.
¹⁴ **Although you say that you don't see him,
 the case is before him;
 so wait anxiously for him.**
¹⁵ Even though his anger is now held back,
 a person doesn't know it's only delayed.^[a]
¹⁶ So Job mouths emptiness;
 he piles up ignorant words.

Job 36

Continuing, Elihu said,

² Wait a little while so I can demonstrate for you
 that there is still something more to say
 about God.
³ I will draw from my broad knowledge,
 attribute justice to my maker.
⁴ My words are certainly truthful;
 one with total knowledge is present with you.

Divine discipline

⁵ Look, God is mighty and doesn't reject anyone;
 he is mighty in strength and mind.
⁶ He doesn't let the wicked live,
 but grants justice to the poor.
⁷ He doesn't avert his eyes from the righteous;
 he seats kings on thrones forever,
 and they are lifted up.
⁸ If they are tied with ropes,
 caught in cords of affliction,
⁹ he informs them about their offenses
 and their grave sins.
¹⁰ He opens their ears with discipline
 and commands them to turn from wrong.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

¹¹ If they listen and serve,
 they spend their days in plenty,
 their years contentedly.
¹² But if they don't listen,
 they perish by the sword,
 breathe their last without understanding.
¹³ Those with impious hearts become furious;
 they don't cry out even though he binds
 them.
¹⁴ They die young;
 they are among the holy ones.
¹⁵ He saves the weak in their affliction,
 opens their ears through oppression.
¹⁶ Surely he draws you up from the brink of
 trouble
 to a wide place without distress;
 your table is set with rich food.
¹⁷ You are overly concerned about the case of the
 wicked;
 justice will be upheld in it.
¹⁸ Don't let them lure you with wealth;
 don't let a huge bribe mislead you.
¹⁹ Will he arrange your rescue from distress
 or from all your exertions of strength?
²⁰ Don't wish for the night
 when people vanish from their place.
²¹ Take care; don't turn to evil
 because you've chosen it over affliction.
²² Look, God is inaccessible due to his power;
 who is a teacher like him?
²³ Who has repaid him for his action,
 and who would ever say, "You've done
 wrong"?
²⁴ Remember to praise his work
 that all of us have seen.
²⁵ Every person has seen him;
 people can observe at great distance.

God's control of the storm

²⁶ Look, God is exalted and unknowable;
 the number of his years is beyond counting.
²⁷ He draws up drops of water
 that distill rain from his flood;
²⁸ the clouds pour moisture



and drip continually on humans.
²⁹ *Even if one perceives a spreading cloud
 and the thunder of his pavilion,^[a]*
³⁰ *look how he spreads lightning across it
 and covers the seabed;*
³¹ *for by water^[a] he judges peoples*

and gives food in abundance.
³² *He conceals lightning in his palms
 and orders it to its target.*
³³ *His thunder announces it;
 even cattle proclaim its rising*

Elihu – Godly speaker. Speaking on behalf of God.

36:1–37:24 In the fourth and final part of his speech (36:1–37:24), Elihu speaks on God’s behalf, defending God’s disciplinary ways and extolling His greatness. After a brief introduction where he claims to be speaking on behalf of God (vv. 2–4), he discusses suffering as God’s discipline and the restoration that comes with repentance (vv. 5–15). He then applies this to Job, encouraging him to repent and not sin (vv. 16–21). Elihu then extols God’s greatness (36:22–37:13). He again addresses Job directly, encouraging him to consider God’s greatness as he makes his complaint (37:14–20). He closes with another description of God’s majestic splendor (37:21–24).²

36:24–37:13 Elihu reminds Job to extol God’s work by praising God himself. He emphasizes God’s supremacy over humanity, and marvels at God’s greatness as seen in a storm. By proclaiming God’s greatness, Elihu hopes to show Job that he is wrong to contend with a God so much greater than humanity (33:12). Job, however, has acknowledged God’s power (26:2–14). This speech anticipates God’s speeches, where He proclaims His supremacy over all creation (38:2–40:2; 40:7–41:34).³

- **Due to God’s Objectives/Directives:**

i.e. Consider the Man Born Blind - For **GOD to be GLORIFIED John 9:1-3(4-5)**

Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. ² And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³ Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. ⁴ must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

- **Due to My own Sinful Choices:** Not only am I responsible for my own sin but I am also powerless to stop sinning.

This TRUTH magnifies my need of a Savior.

Romans 7:1-6 Freedom from the Law

***7** Brothers and sisters, I’m talking to you as people who know the Law. Don’t you know that the Law has power over someone only as long as he or she lives? ² A married woman is united with her husband under the Law while he is alive. But if her husband dies, she is released from the Law concerning her husband. ³ So then, if she lives with another man while her husband is alive, she’s committing adultery. But if her husband dies, she’s free from the Law, so she won’t be committing adultery if she marries someone else. ⁴ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you also died with respect to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you could*

² Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., Whitehead, M. M., Grigoni, M. R., & Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (Job 36:1–37:24). Lexham Press.

³ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., Whitehead, M. M., Grigoni, M. R., & Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (Job 36:24–26). Lexham Press.



*be united with someone else. You are united with the one who was raised from the dead so that we can bear fruit for God. ⁵ **When we were self-centered, the sinful passions aroused through the Law were at work in all the parts of our body, so that we bore fruit for death.** ⁶ But now we have been released from the Law. We have died with respect to the thing that controlled us, so that we can be slaves in the new life under the Spirit, not in the old life under the written Law.*

Romans 7:18–19

*I know that good doesn't live in me—that is, in my body. The desire to do good is inside of me, but I can't do it. ¹⁹ I don't do the good that I want to do, but I do the evil that I don't want to do. **CEB***

- **Due to Lack of Faith: Luke 1:20 CEB**

Know this: What I have spoken will come true at the proper time. But because you didn't believe, you will remain silent, unable to speak until the day when these things happen."

[focus of an entire week]

- **Due to answering God's call**

Jesus' Suffering in Silence: Isaiah 53 (Acts 8:31-33) HCSB

Who has believed what we have heard?^(a)
And who has the arm of the Lord^(a) been revealed to?^(b)

² He grew up before Him like a young plant^(c)
and like a root out of dry ground.

He didn't have an impressive form
or majesty that we should look at Him,
no appearance that we should desire
Him.^(d)

³ He was despised and rejected by men,^(e)
a man of suffering who knew what
sickness was.^(f)

He was like someone people turned
away from;^(g)

He was despised, and we didn't value
Him.

⁴ Yet He Himself bore our sicknesses,
and He carried our pains;^(h)

but we in turn regarded Him stricken,
struck down by God,⁽ⁱ⁾ and afflicted.

⁵ But He was pierced because of our
transgressions,^(j)

crushed because of our iniquities;^(k)
punishment^(l) for our peace was on Him,
and we are healed by His wounds.^(m)

⁶ We all went astray like sheep;⁽ⁿ⁾
we all have turned to our own way;
and the Lord has punished Him
for^(o) the iniquity^(p) of us all.^(q)

⁷ He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet He did not open His mouth.
Like a lamb led to the slaughter
and like a sheep silent before her
shearers,

He did not open His mouth.^(r)

⁸ He was taken away because of
oppression and judgment;
and who considered His fate?^(s)

For He was cut off from the land of the
living; He was struck because of my
people's rebellion.

⁹ They^(t) made His grave with the wicked
and with a rich man at His death,^(u)
although He had done no violence
and had not spoken deceitfully.^(v)



10 Yet the Lord was pleased^(S) to crush Him severely.^(D)
 When^(L) You make Him a restitution offering,^(W)
 He will see His seed, He will prolong His days,
 and by His hand, the Lord's pleasure will be accomplished.^(W)

11 He will see it^(L) out of His anguish, and He will be satisfied with His knowledge.

Footnotes

- a. [Isaiah 53:1](#) Or *believed our report*
- b. [Isaiah 53:3](#) Lit *And like a hiding of faces from Him*
- c. [Isaiah 53:6](#) Or *has placed on Him; lit with*
- d. [Isaiah 53:8](#) Or *and as for His generation, who considered [Him]?*

Cross references

- A. [53:1](#) : [Is 30:30](#); [40:10](#); [48:14](#); [51:9](#); [52:10](#); [Lk 1:51](#); [Ac 13:17](#)
- B. [53:1](#) : [Jn 12:38](#); [Rm 10:16](#)
- C. [53:2](#) : [Is 11:1](#)
- D. [53:2](#) : [Is 52:14](#)
- E. [53:3](#) : [Ps 22:6](#); [Is 49:7](#); [Lk 18:31-33](#)
- F. [53:3](#) : [Mk 8:31](#); [Jn 1:10-11](#); [Heb 4:15](#)
- G. [53:4](#) : [Mt 8:17](#); [1Pt 2:21](#)
- H. [53:4](#) : [Ps 69:26](#)
- I. [53:5](#) : [Is 53:8](#); [Rm 4:25](#); [1Co 15:3](#); [Heb 9:28](#)
- J. [53:5](#) : [Is 1:4](#)
- K. [53:5](#) : [Jr 2:30](#); [Zph 3:2](#); [Heb 5:8](#)
- L. [53:5-6](#) : [1Pt 2:24-25](#)
- M. [53:6](#) : [Mt 18:12](#)
- N. [53:6](#) : [Is 13:11](#)

My righteous^(W) Servant^(S) will justify many,^(D)

and He will carry their iniquities.

12 Therefore I will give Him^(L) the many as a portion,
 and He will receive^(L) the mighty as spoil,
 because He submitted Himself to death,^(D)

and was counted among the rebels;^(AA)
 yet He bore the sin of many^(AB)
 and interceded for the rebels.^(AC)

- e. [Isaiah 53:9](#) DSS; MT reads *He*
- f. [Isaiah 53:10](#) Or *Him; He made Him sick.*
- g. [Isaiah 53:10](#) Or *If*
- h. [Isaiah 53:11](#) DSS, LXX read *see light*
- i. [Isaiah 53:12](#) Or *Him with*
- j. [Isaiah 53:12](#) Or *receive with*

- O. [53:6](#) : [2Co 5:21](#); [Col 2:14](#)
- P. [53:7](#) : [Jr 11:19](#); [Mt 26:63](#); [27:12-14](#); [Lk 23:9](#); [Jn 19:9](#); [Ac 8:32-33](#); [1Pt 2:23](#)
- Q. [53:9](#) : [Mt 27:57-60](#)
- R. [53:9](#) : [Heb 4:15](#); [1Pt 2:22](#); [1Jn 3:5](#)
- S. [53:10](#) : [Is 44:28](#); [55:11](#)
- T. [53:10](#) : [Dt 29:22](#); [Is 17:11](#)
- U. [53:10](#) : [Lv 5:1-19](#)
- V. [53:10](#) : [Is 46:10](#)
- W. [53:11](#) : [1Jn 2:1](#)
- X. [53:11](#) : [Is 42:1](#)
- Y. [53:11](#) : [Ac 13:39](#); [Rm 5:18-19](#)
- Z. [53:12](#) : [Mt 26:42](#); [Jn 10:14-18](#); [Php 2:6-8](#)
- AA. [53:12](#) : [Lk 22:37](#)
- BB. [53:12](#) : [Heb 9:28](#)
- CC. [53:12](#) : [Lk 23:34](#); [Rm 8:34](#); [Heb 7:25](#)

Matthew 26:63 (Mk 14:61)

But Jesus was silent. The high priest said, "By the living God, I demand that you tell us whether you are the Christ, God's Son." **CEB**



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

#3. SILENCE as Lament: [when SILENCE Laments]

Lament: A complaint against God that turns us towards Him and lifts our arms to cling to His promises. Lament is a stepping stone up to Praise.

Parry, R. (2010). [Lamentations](#) (pp. 221–228). William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

1 Samuel 7:2 NKJV

So it was that the ark remained in Kirjath Jearim a long time; it was there twenty years. And all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.

The Philistines Capture the Ark—1 Sam. 4:1b Through 7:2

What Happened at Aphek?—1 Sam. 4:1b–11

A detailed report of a national disaster immediately follows the enthusiastic appraisal of Samuel as “a prophet of the LORD” (1 Sam. 3:19 through 4:1a). If Israel was to remain in Canaan, the Philistine threat needed to be addressed. The situation finally reached a climax at the battle of Aphek in the territory of Ephraim, not long after 1050 B.C. (1 Sam. 4). There the Philistines defeated the Israelite army and killed Eli’s sons, Hophni and Phinehas. The Philistines then carried away the ark of the covenant. Probably the sanctuary at Shiloh was destroyed at that time.

Samuel himself, however, is conspicuously absent from the account. The text ascribes him no role in the preliminaries to the battle with the Philistines at Aphek/Ebenezer (4:1). Neither is he included in the arrangements for leaving the ark at Kiriath Jearim (7:1).

What Happened to the Ark?—1 Sam. 4:12 Through 6:21

The circumstances surrounding the captured ark are reported in two short chapters. The gods of the Philistines met Yahweh in representative combat. This confrontation, interestingly, took place in Philistia, in the temple of Dagon at Ashdod. It was customary for victorious armies in the Near East to place the gods of defeated nations in their temples. But, as the Philistines discovered, the God of Israel was not captured with the ark. The ark soon engendered considerable curiosity and was placed on public display (1 Sam. 5:4, 6, 9–10). The scene was now set for the contest to begin. The story that follows uses Dagon as the representative god of Philistia. The ark was placed as a trophy in Dagon’s temple. To the Philistines’ consternation, Dagon was found prostrated before the ark on the following morning. From this point in the story, there is no further mention of the gods of the Philistines. In fact, Philistine priests begin to sound like Hebrew prophets (6:6).⁴

Daniel 6:20 NKJV

And when he came to the den, he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel. The king spoke, saying to Daniel, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?”

Matthew 11:17

and saying: ‘We played the flute for you, And you did not dance; We mourned to you, And you did not lament.’

John 16:20

Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy.

⁴ Raccah, W. (2003). [From Tribal League to Kingdom](#). In W. C. Williams & S. M. Horton (Eds.), *They Spoke from God: A Survey of the Old Testament* (pp. 418–420). Gospel Publishing House; Logion Press.



#4. SILENCE as Rest: [When SILENCE brings **Rest** in 3 parts]

Psalm 62:1-2

Only in God do I find rest; my salvation comes from Him.

² Only God is my rock and my salvation— my stronghold!—I won't be shaken anymore.

CEB

Truly [Ⓜ]my soul silently *waits* for God;

From Him *comes* my salvation.

² He only *is* my rock and my salvation;

He is my [Ⓜ]defense;

I shall not be greatly [Ⓜ]moved. **NKJV**

#5. SILENCE as a Whisper: “carries practically the force of “silence”

[When SILENCE **Whispers**]

Psalm 107:29

God quieted the storm to a whisper, the sea's waves were hushed. **CEB**

1 Kings 19:11-13

¹¹ *The Lord said, “Go out and stand at the mountain before the Lord. The Lord is passing by.” A very strong wind tore through the mountains and broke apart the stones before the Lord. But the Lord wasn't in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake. But the Lord wasn't in the earthquake. ¹² After the earthquake, there was a fire. But the Lord wasn't in the fire. After the fire, there was a sound. Thin. Quiet. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his coat. He went out and stood at the cave's entrance. A voice came to him and said, “Why are you here, Elijah?”* **CEB**

Job 4:12-17.⁵

But a word sneaked up on me; my ears caught a hint of it.

¹³ *In profound thoughts, visions of night, when deep sleep falls on people,*

¹⁴ *fear and dread struck me;
all of my bones shook.*

¹⁵ *A breeze swept by my face;
the hair of my skin bristled.*

¹⁶ *It stopped. I didn't recognize its visible form, although a figure was in front of my eyes. Silence! Then I heard a voice:*

⁵ Freeman, H. E. (1975). [Silence](#). In C. F. Pfeiffer, H. F. Vos, & J. Rea (Eds.), *The Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*. Moody Press.



17 "Can a human be more righteous than God,
a person purer than their maker?" **CEB**

#6. SILENCE as a Command: (Sounds like "hush"!)

Habakkuk 2:20

"But^(A) the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him." **NKJV**

Zephaniah 1:7

Be silent in the presence of the Lord God; For the day of the Lord is at hand, For the Lord has...**NKJV**

Hush before the Lord God, for the day of the Lord is near!

The Lord has established a sacrifice; He has made holy those He has summoned. **CEB**

Zechariah 2:13

Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord, for He is aroused from His holy habitation!" **NKJV**

Be silent, everyone, in the Lord's presence, because he has moved from his holy habitation! **CEB**

Dūmā is used only metaphorically: of Edom in **Isa 21:11**, "the oracle of Dumah" (lit. silence), having figurative reference to the desolation to fall upon Edom (Dumah);

#7. Death defined as SILENCE: [When SILENCE defines as Death]

Psalm 94:17

Unless the Lord had been my help, My soul would soon have settled in silence.

#8. Sheol – the place of SILENCE:

Psalm 115:17

The dead do not praise the Lord, Nor any who go down into silence. **NKJV**

#9. SILENCE as to Refrain from Speaking: [When SILENCE Abstains]

Ps 39:1-2

*I said, "I will guard my ways,
Lest I sin with my ^(A)tongue;
I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle,
While the wicked are before me."*

^{2 (B)}*I was mute with silence,*

I held my peace even from good;

And my sorrow was stirred up. **NKJV**

I promised I would watch my steps

so as not to sin with my tongue;

promised to keep my mouth shut

as long as the wicked were in my

presence.² So I was completely quiet, silent. I

kept my peace, but it did no good. My pain got

worse. **CEB**

Paul speaking in Hebrew to the Hebrew's (Acts 21:40-22:1)

Those women's silent reserve in the church (1 Tim 2:11-12)

figuratively of Babylon's silence (of extinction Isa 47:5)

dumb idols ("stone of silence," Hab 2:19);

#10. Silence as a Resignation of Faith:



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

Psalm 62:1 Truly my soul silently waits for God;
From Him comes my salvation.

Notice. Acceptance. Acquiescence. Submission.

#11. Silence of Shame:

Ezekiel 16:62-63

⁶² I myself will establish my covenant with you, and you will know that I am the Lord. ⁶³ Then you will remember and be ashamed, and you won't even open your mouth because of your shame, after I've forgiven you for all that you've done. This is what the Lord God says.

#12. Silence of Expecting God to ACT:

Joshua 6:10 Joshua ordered the people, "Don't shout. Don't let your voice be heard. Don't let a word come out of your mouth until the day I tell you, 'Shout!' Then shout!" **CEB**

Genesis 24:21 The man stood gazing at her, wondering silently if the Lord had made his trip successful or not. **CEB**

Exodus 14:14-15 But Moses said to the people, "Don't be afraid. Stand your ground, and watch the Lord rescue you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never ever see again. ¹⁴ The Lord will fight for you. You just keep still."

¹⁵ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to get moving. **CEB**

2 Kings 2:3-5

The group of prophets from Bethel came out to Elisha. These prophets said to Elisha, "Do you know that the Lord is going to take your master away from you today?"

Elisha said, "Yes, I know. Don't talk about it!"

⁴ Elijah said, "Elisha, stay here, because the Lord has sent me to Jericho."

But Elisha said, "As the Lord lives and as you live, I won't leave you." So they went to Jericho.

⁵ The group of prophets from Jericho approached Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the Lord is going to take your master away from you today?"

He said, "Yes, I know. Don't talk about it!" **CEB**



#13. Prophetic Silence:

Zechariah 13:1–5 CEB

*On that day, a fountain will open
to cleanse^(a) the sin and impurity of David's house and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.*

² *On that day, says the Lord of heavenly forces,
I will eliminate the names of the idols from the land;
they will no longer be remembered.*

Moreover, I will remove the prophets and the sinful spirit from the land.

³ *If anyone again prophesies,
then that person's birth father and mother will say,
"You won't live, for you have told a lie in the name of the Lord."*

That person's own birth father and mother will stab him when he prophesies.

⁴ *On that day each of the prophets will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies
and won't put on a shaggy coat in order to deceive.*

⁵ *Each will say, "I'm not a prophet.
I'm a man who works the ground, for the soil has been my occupation since I was
young."*

#14. Silence as Pondering:

Psalm 77:5-6

I consider days of old, years long past.^(a)

⁶ *At night I remember my music;
I meditate in my heart, and my spirit ponders. HCSB*

Proverbs 4:26 *Ponder the path of your feet, And let all your ways be established. NKJV*

Proverbs 5:6 *Lest you ponder her path of life— Her ways are unstable; You do not
know them. NKJV*

Proverbs 5:21 *For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, And He ponders all
his paths. NKJV*



Luke 2:18-20

*And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. ¹⁹ [Ⓐ]But Mary kept all these things and pondered (treasured) them in her heart. ²⁰ Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and [Ⓐ]praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them. **NKJV***

#15. Silence as a Command of Authority from Jesus Christ:

Mark 1:25-26 (luke 4:35)

*²⁵ But Jesus [Ⓐ]rebuked him, saying, [Ⓐ]“Be quiet, and come out of him!” ²⁶ And when the unclean spirit [Ⓐ]had convulsed him and cried out with a loud voice, he came out of him. **NKJV***

Mark 4:39

Then He arose and [Ⓐ]rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, [Ⓐ]“Peace, [Ⓐ]be still!” And the wind ceased and there was a great calm.

#16. Silence in Heaven: (one of expectancy)

Revelation 8:1

When[Ⓐ] He (the Lamb) opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. **NKJV**

The Seventh Seal (8:1)

The opening of the seventh seal results in an anticlimactic **silence**. Instead of the expected culmination of all that had gone before, there is no action at all, but **silence in heaven for about half an hour**. How should we understand that? **First**, note the importance of silence in the Old Testament. “Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord” (Zech. 2:13); “Be still, and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10); “The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him” (Hab. 2:20); “Commune with your own hearts ... and be silent” (Ps. 4:4). However, here the **silence** is not in human hearts or on earth but **in heaven**. God reveals his glory not only with lightning, thunder, and earthquake (cf. 8:5) but also in “a still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12). Thus the silence *may* indicate that nothing can supersede the glory of the last vision (7:9–17).

Second, the silence certainly serves as a dramatic contrast to the cosmic upheavals of the sixth seal (6:12–17) as well as to the subsequent blowing of trumpets. Moreover, the seventh seal indicates that the two visions that follow the opening of the sixth seal are an interlude (7:1–17) offering prophetic previews of the church before, and after, the day of wrath.

Third, the silence following the opening of the seventh seal also indicates that the seal visions are now complete. In 4 Ezra 7:30 a cosmic silence of seven days signals the return of the world to its primeval state. John may have used this motif and, as usual, changed it. The interval of seven days of silence enveloping the whole world becomes a brief half-hour period and it is enjoined **in heaven only**. At any rate, the silence in heaven rounds off the seal visions. Finally, out of the silence of the seventh seal vision evolves the trumpet cycle which expands the seal visions. The half-hour silence in heaven therefore also serves as preparation for and transition to the trumpet septet.

Still, the silence in heaven is startling! It is the counterpart to the throne room vision. God is listening to us (cf. 8:3; 5:8)! Thus far he has not spoken one word in the body of this letter. In Johns noisy world where everybody is talking and no one is listening, where ears get filled with state propaganda, phony advertisements, whining gossip,



self-serving rhetoric, ideologies from religious hucksters, words and more words and lies, the **silence** in heaven is extraordinary. God is listening to us, to our prayers, groans, and helpless cries: Lord, how long (6:10)? Out of the silence of the listening God, listening to the prayers of the saints, the blasts of the seven trumpets evolve.

With the seventh seal, the scroll has now been fully opened. But, surprise! The content of the scroll is never read. It is enacted in such a way that the seal visions may be regarded as introduction to and summary of what is to come.⁶

THURSDAY, November 30th

Friday, December 1st
Saturday, December 2nd
Sunday, December 3rd

Monday, December 4th
Tuesday, December 5th
Wednesday, December 6th
Thursday, December 7th
Friday, December 8th
Saturday December 9th

Sunday, December 10th

Monday, December 11th
Tuesday, December 12th
Wednesday, December 13th

Thursday, December 14th
Friday, December 15th
Saturday, December 16th
Sunday, December 17th

Monday, December 18th
Tuesday, December 19th
Wednesday, December 20th

Thursday, December 21st
Friday, December 22nd
Saturday, December 23rd
Sunday, December 24th
Monday, December 25th

Tuesday, December 26th
Wednesday, December 27th

Thursday, December 28th
Friday, December 29th
Saturday, December 30th
Sunday, December 31st

NOTES:

1 Samuel 7:1-2

When Samuel was young and Eli was old, the Philistines captured the ark of the covenant (1 Sam. 4). The ark wreaked havoc in Philistine territory: the image of Dagon in the Ashdod temple ended up decapitated, and the Philistines' cities were devastated by a plague (1 Sam. 5). The Philistines sent the ark back to Israelite territory, but when it arrived in Beth Shemesh, several curiosity seekers were struck dead when they failed to show it proper respect (1 Sam. 6). Finally the men of Kiriath Jearim took the ark to their town, where it remained for many years (1 Sam. 7:1-2). After David has conquered Jerusalem and built his palace there, he decides to make the city the religious center of Israel. For this to happen, the ark, symbolizing God's presence among his people, must be brought to the city. It is appropriate that the Lord reside in a central sanctuary in the city, for he is the one who possesses ultimate authority over Israel and has chosen David as his vice-regent (2 Sam. 6:2, 21). The arrival of the ark is the prelude to David's decision to build the temple (2 Sam. 7).⁷

⁶ Krodel, G. A. (1989). *Revelation* (pp. 188-189). Augsburg Publishing House.

⁷ Chisholm, R. B., Jr. (2013). *1 & 2 Samuel* (M. L. Strauss, J. H. Walton, & R. de Rosset, Eds.; p. 212). Baker Books.



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

Silence defines as Death

Psalm 124

*If the Lord had not been on our side—
let Israel say—*

*² If the Lord had not been on our side
when men attacked us,*

*³ then they would have swallowed us alive
in their burning anger against us.*

*⁴ Then the waters would have engulfed us;
the torrent would have swept over us;*

⁵ the raging waters would have swept over us.

*⁶ Praise the Lord,
who has not let us be ripped apart by their teeth.*

*⁷ We have escaped like a bird from the hunter's net;
the net is torn, and we have escaped.*

*⁸ Our help is in the name of Yahweh,
the Maker of heaven and earth. **HCSB***

The Place of Lament in Christian Spirituality

It is often observed that lament was embraced within the worship of Israel but that the Christian church has been far more ambiguous about it. Should laments form part of Christian spirituality? The question is not as simple to answer as it is to ask.

The earliest Christians knew suffering in various shapes and sizes. Like the ancient Israelites in Lamentations, Christians in the earliest churches were sometimes imprisoned, went hungry, were beaten, and even killed. In some localities hostility against the church would flare up from time to time, making life very difficult. Social shaming and humiliation were not infrequently their lot. The New Testament makes no claims that Christian existence is pain-free, so while believers are to “rejoice with those who rejoice” in the church, they are also to “weep with those who weep” (Rom 12:15). Christians can be hurt, and fellow believers are called to stand in solidarity with them.

So far as we can tell, the early churches practiced conventional customs of mourning. Thus, when Stephen was martyred we read that “devout men buried Stephen and made *great lamentation* over him” (Acts 8:2), and when Dorcas died we are told that the widows *wept* and displayed her works (Acts 9:36f). Jesus himself wept at the death of Lazarus (John 11:35) and over the coming destruction of the Jerusalem of his day (Luke 19:41–44).

Jesus is not so much confirming that Jerusalem's fate will be a righteous punishment of God upon a sinful city as he is raising a lament over the suffering that the destruction will bring upon the city's



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

inhabitants. In the tears that Jesus sheds over this city, the divine compassion towards those who must suffer is more pronounced than the divine wrath that makes such a punishment necessary.

This embracing of lament by Jesus is reinforced as he is led to the cross.

And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. But turning to them Jesus said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" (Luke 23:27–31)

Jesus is saying that his crucifixion by the Romans on a false charge of rebellion (he is the green wood) is a sign of the fate in store for the whole nation that is setting itself on a collision course with Rome by means of militant rebellion (Israel is the dry wood ready for burning). The whole city will be "crucified," and Jesus is saying that, as in the book of Lamentations, weeping and lamenting are an apt response to such horrors.

Also relevant for our reflections is the acute mental suffering Paul testified to in 2 Corinthians. Richard Dormandy has argued at length that in 2 Corinthians Paul is in the process of recovering from a crisis of severe emotional suffering. He itemizes the following aspects of the loss Paul had suffered:

He has, like a star footballer, lost his winning streak and has had to face failure (4:3). With this he has lost his standing and reputation (13:7). He has lost his status and authority in Corinth (10:1). Possibly he has lost his physical or mental health (7:5). He has lost his heart for evangelism because he is overwhelmed by the presence of the problem in Corinth (2:12–13)... He speaks of death as a relief ... (5:1–4). He is aware of the powerlessness of his prayers (12:8), which may have been a contrast with the past (12:12), and his weakness in general (12:9–10).

The recent loss above may have compounded earlier losses: the split with his friend Barnabas and the growing isolation from his spiritual home (the church in Antioch). As Paul writes 2 Corinthians, he has begun his journey of recovery, but we see his wounded soul laid bare. The straw that broke the camel's back was an unspecified situation in Asia (imprisonment? illness?) that was too much for him to cope with. Whatever the crisis was, it was a near-death experience. He wrote:

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. (2 Cor 1:8–11)

Paul is writing from a position in which he has begun to experience deliverance. What is interesting is the way he describes his suffering prior to that: "We were under great pressure, *far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life.* Indeed, in our hearts we felt



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

the sentence of death.” He is very open about the fact that when he was in the midst of this experience he was not positive about receiving God’s deliverance. If the “thorn in his side” spoken of in 2 Cor 12:7–9 refers to the same affliction, then we know that on three occasions Paul cried to the Lord for deliverance and on each occasion he was not delivered. And it was in this situation that Paul came to experience God as “the God of all comfort who comforts us in all our affliction” (2 Cor 1:3–4). This ties in directly to the theme of God-the-comforter in Isaiah 40–55 and back further into Zion’s experience in Lamentations of no-comfort. Thus, Paul found himself *as a Christian* in a situation in some ways analogous to Zion’s, and his prayers for deliverance went unanswered. *Then* he found the comfort of God.

While the New Testament bears witness to the real pain and suffering of Christians which can come out in prayer, we have little evidence of laments of complaint. The believer sometimes called to God for deliverance and may have been perplexed at why the suffering lasts so long, but there is no hint of any accusation that God has behaved wrongly. Indeed, the Psalter is the most quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament, and so it is interesting to note the lack of New Testament references to lament psalms. Although direct references to biblical laments are few and far between in the New Testament, we do find their influence in some of the motifs and vocabulary used in the New Testament. For instance, the agonizing question, “How long, O Lord?” so common in biblical laments is echoed on the lips of the martyred saints in Rev 6:9–10. Similarly, the “groaning” of creation, church, and Spirit in Romans 8 may be seen as a lament of sorts.

But let’s backtrack: Christian reflection on the place of lament must begin with Christ. Of particular interest is the fact that a complaint psalm is found on the lips of Christ on the cross (Ps 22:1). It is important to appreciate that this Psalm was not incidental to the crucifixion narratives but was fundamental, in Matthew, Mark, and John at least, in shaping them. The use of this psalm in the early church for interpreting the story of Jesus is also testified to by the linking of the praise section in Heb 2:12 (Ps 22:22 in particular) to the solidarity in which the human Christ stands with us. Hebrews 5:7 also seems to have Ps 22:1–2 & 24 in mind when the author writes, “During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.” If Ps 22:24 is in mind here, then this would directly link the praise section at the end of the Psalm with the resurrection: a very natural hermeneutical move for those who have made the connection between the suffering of the psalmist and the suffering of Christ.

Next we need to note the contradiction between Ps 22:1–2:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent.

and 22:24:

For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

This suggests that the Psalmist's perception of the situation has changed. He is in terrible suffering and feels abandoned by God (22:1–8, 12–18). He calls to YHWH for salvation (22:9–11, 19–21) and then, perhaps after receiving some salvation oracle from the priest, takes on an attitude of confidence that God has heard him and will deliver him (22:22–31). The same pattern is seen in the story of Jesus on the cross. Mark 15:25 sees Jesus on the cross from the third hour (about 9 A.M.). From the sixth hour (12 NOON) until the ninth hour (3 P.M.) a darkness descends over the land (Mark 15:33; Matt 27:45; Luke 23:44). During this period of six hours Jesus has been experiencing the suffering of the righteous individual in the Psalms. Indeed, the suffering extends back through the tears of Gethsemane to the decision to go to Jerusalem knowing what lay ahead. At about 3 P.M. Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?" When groping around for words to express the feelings of grief at his perceived abandonment by the God whom he had worshipped from birth, it is no surprise that these words came to mind. Jesus was saturated in the Scriptures of Israel and cannot have missed the parallels between his predicament and that of the psalmist.

What is interesting is that the cry of dereliction comes not long before Jesus dies. This is not a period of doubt he went through near the beginning of his time on the cross and quickly got over. This was a simmering, growing despair held back in dignified silence until he can hold in no longer. For Matthew and Mark, it is the last thing they record Jesus saying before his crying out in a loud voice and dying. Luke and John record more positive last words ("Father, into your hands I commit my spirit," Luke 23:46; "It is finished," John 19:30).

While we need to respect the different emphases of the different Gospels, it is perfectly possible to imagine Jesus drawing hope and inspiration in the midst of his despair from the ultimate deliverance experienced by the psalmist that he has so identified himself with. But even if we use Psalm 22 to hold together the dark words of Jesus recorded in Matthew and Mark with the positive, final words in Luke and John, we must emphasize that (i) the darkness of his suffering expressed in the cry of dereliction was not a momentary doubt but a growing and prolonged anguish, (ii) the darkness experienced was not some Scripture-quoting ritual done for show but a genuine expression of how Jesus felt, (iii) that Jesus was not *abandoning* God in this prayer (for the psalmist, as for Jesus, God is still "*my God*," the one to whom they turn for deliverance), and (iv) that the positive change in Jesus' final moments may well have been influenced by the end of Psalm 22.

Now where does this story place the Christian vis-à-vis the laments of Israel? Jesus himself takes the prayer tradition of complaint against YHWH upon his own lips. Jesus prays the lament *as his own prayer*. He stood as Israel's messianic representative, suffering *and lamenting* with his people Israel. He stood as the Adamic representative of the whole of humanity, suffering *and lamenting* with those broken upon the wheel of life. This must, for the Christian, legitimate Israel's worship tradition of lament.

But the situation is more complex for the Christian than this might suggest. On the following Sunday Jesus was raised from the dead, and at that point the praise section at the end of Psalm 22 was more fitting for the situation. Lament is appropriate on the cross, but not by the empty



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

tomb. So where do Christians stand now in relation to the cross and its cry of dereliction and the resurrection with its song of joy? Is lament appropriate this side of Easter?

It is widely recognized that the New Testament has what is sometimes referred to as an inaugurated eschatology. Appreciating how this works is fundamental for Christian reappropriation of Israel's laments, so it will be necessary to explain it briefly. The inaugurated eschatologies of the New Testament documents represent a Christian adjustment of some contemporaneous Jewish apocalyptic eschatologies. According to these Jewish apocalyptic stories, the current situation in which Israel found itself was one of crisis. Pagan nations ruled over the people of God and persecuted them. The present age was one of darkness, suffering, and death for the saints. The apocalyptic hope was for the in-breaking of the kingdom of God. God has allowed his enemies time to afflict his people Israel, but their time is running out. The Lord will bring their reign to an end and will vindicate his people before the world. So the story is clear: for Israel there is suffering now and glory later.

This basic story was picked up by the Christians: currently the community will suffer for its allegiance to the Messiah, but their vindication is coming, so they must hang in there. But for the church, the situation was more complicated than that. The story of their suffering and vindication had already been played out in the life of their representative, the Messiah Jesus. His death embodied the sufferings of God's people at the hands of oppressors. His resurrection was their vindication/justification. The resurrection of Christ was the in-breaking of their future deliverance. So for the early church, the new age had *already* arrived. New creation had come. The current age was no longer simply the present evil age. It was instead a time of paradox and overlap. It was still a time lived in the shadow of the cross (when suffering and sin and death awaited their final defeat), but the future salvation had begun to infiltrate. The gospel message had an inbuilt element of certainty about the glorious future because that future was already present in Christ's resurrection.

Matthew Boulton has helpfully suggested a way of linking Jesus' use of Psalm 22 to the inaugurated eschatology of the New Testament. He maintains that in Psalm 22 there is a negation of the God of glory but a clinging to God's promise of salvation. In Boulton's view, the Psalm does not end with salvation but with a vow to praise in light of the promise of salvation. The vow to praise is "an eschatological form of speech, a present trace of a future event, a foretaste, both present and absent, 'already' and 'not yet' in play." Jesus' use of the psalm, liturgically commemorated in Holy Week, has implications for the pattern of Christian worship itself.

Jesus' citation of Psalm 22 fashions Easter's 'hallelujah'—and with it all proper Christian praise—into an eschatological act, a gesture at once indicating decisive divine victory ('He is risen!') and the ongoing facts of crisis and suffering, which is to say, the fact that divine victory is nonetheless forthcoming, nonetheless 'not yet.' ... Christian praise is properly eschatological praise, jubilant insofar as it witnesses to divine victory and deliverance, anguished insofar as it witnesses to creation's ongoing need of the same.

Lament serves as a complaint against God, but also as a turning towards and clinging to the divine promise thus reconfiguring praise as an "impossible" revival of hope in the midst of



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

darkness. “Christian doxology is properly offered by way of cruciform lament, continually reworked into Easter’s ‘hallelujah’ by way of human anguish and indignation, which is to say, continually reworked into eschatological praise by way of unabashed Christian lamentation.”

So where in the story of God’s people found in the Scriptures (our Old Testament) would the early Christians have placed themselves? With Lamentations? Yes, in that they were experiencing affliction at the hands of their enemies. Yes, in that they were groaning in pain as they awaited final deliverance. But the resurrection of Christ and the giving of the Spirit served as signs that God had acted decisively to redeem them, and this places them in a different location from the speakers of Lamentations—*after* the pain of divine silence. The Christians associated themselves most closely with the Israel addressed in Isaiah 40–55. Second Isaiah’s words were directed to a people still in exile, but they were words of comfort heralding the certainty of immanent salvation. The words of Isaiah 40–55 seemed to speak directly to the Christians’ own situation. Suffering? Yes, for a while, but the light of dawn is already breaking over the horizon and the coming of the sun is certain.

This death and resurrection of the Messiah put the understanding of suffering in the New Testament in a different light from that found in Lamentations. **The Christians made sense of their own suffering in the light of Christ’s suffering.** Christ was *not suffering for his sin* but was innocent like the righteous sufferers in the Psalms and Lam 4:13. The community of Christ was similarly persecuted for righteousness’ sake and *not as a divine punishment*. So it is no accident that when Paul appropriates a communal lament psalm (Psalm 44) in Rom 8:36, it is the only communal lament in which the *innocence* of the suffering community is pleaded. For Paul, the suffering of the innocent community in that psalm finds its parallel in the innocent suffering of the church. The difference is that the psalmist cannot understand why God would allow his people to suffer when they have been faithful to the covenant. For Paul, making sense of the psalm in the light of Christ’s suffering, persecution is part of the calling of those who identify with the bleeding Messiah. This is not the way in which the voices in Lamentations understand their suffering. They are not the sufferers of Psalm 44 who have remained obedient to the covenant. They are being punished by God for their persistent and prolonged breach of the covenant. How can a Christian relate to *that*?

We have found the following disanalogies between the situation the church believes itself to be in and the situation the speakers of Lamentations believed themselves to be in. First, the suffering in Lamentations is seen as divine punishment for covenant *violation*, while the persecution of the church in all its diverse forms is seen as resulting from their covenant *obedience* to Christ. Second, while Lamentations does contain hope that the suffering will come to an end, it is a muted hope overlaid by grief. The resurrection of Jesus injected Christian suffering with a stronger tone of *certainty* of the future. Third, in Lamentations the suffering is understood as purely negative, while the identification made by the Christians of their sufferings with those of Christ transformed their theological imaginations, enabling them to see the world in subversive ways. Their public humiliation at the hands of the world became, in their reconfigured worldview, a badge of honor, of their loyalty to the Lord, and a sign that if they have suffered like him then they will reign with him (Rom 8:17). The story of Jesus’ death



and resurrection is their own story, and as they share in his sufferings they will share in his resurrection. Given this, we may ask whether a Christian could find a word from the Lord in the book of Lamentations.

First, and perhaps most obviously, Christians can see the sufferings of Christ typified in Lamentations. The rationale for this has already been spelled out.

Second, and following on from the first point, Christians can see their sufferings in Lamentations even though they may not be being punished for their sin. The early Christians had a strong sense of their spiritual unification with Christ and saw their persecution as a participation in the persecution of Christ, the righteous sufferer *par excellence*. Consequently, although the Isaianic Servant's role is fulfilled by Christ, the early Christians also felt a liberty to see the Servant's role as applicable to the calling of his body, the church. In just the same way it may be that some Christian readers will see the story of the church etched in the story of the *geber* in Lamentations 3. The fact that persecuted Christians share in Christ's afflictions (which were the afflictions of Jerusalem) creates a space for Christians to see their persecution *partially* reflected in the poetry of Lamentations.

Third, many of the sufferings that Christians and churches experience are not a result of their loyalty to Christ but are simply part of the tragic fabric of a fallen world. Most of the New Testament teaching on suffering, because of its focus on being persecuted for the faith, does not directly address this situation. Romans 8:18–30 offers a wider perspective which sees the grieving of Christians as part of the grieving of the whole created order. The suffering which causes Christians to “groan” is the general frustration and pain of living in a broken creation in bondage to decay and death (cf. 2 Cor 5:1–5). And in that text lie the seeds of a Trinitarian theology of lament. Not only does God participate, in Christ, in our sorrow, lamenting for and *as* us, but through the Spirit God laments for and *with* us. The Spirit groans for a broken world, bearing witness to God's own “grief” at the fractured nature of the world and the torment in it. This pneumatic groan is simultaneously a prayer to the Father to bring creation through to resurrection. Through the lament of the church the Spirit can intercede through us for deliverance of creation. This pneumatic gift of moaning is both an expression of pain and of hope for resurrection.

The idea of lament as an expression of grief and expectation is well put by Nicholas Wolterstorff in his comments on Matt 5:4, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” Who are the mourners? “The Mourners are those who have caught a glimpse of God's new day, who ache with all their being for that day's coming, and who break out into tears when confronted by its absence.... The mourners,” he writes, “are aching visionaries,” and as such their groans serve as prayers for salvation.

Christians can suffer like anyone else and in times of loss can feel deeply perplexed and let down by God. Even belief in hope beyond death may not bring the needed consolation. As Jamie Grant observes:

For the Christian, neither hope in Christ nor certainty of ultimate divine resolution to our problems in any way denies the human need for lament. Lament is not based on the psalmist's lack of future hope, lament is grounded in the psalmist's present experience of life with God in the world. Lament



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

is intrinsic to humanity living in relationship with God in his good but fallen world.... The knowledge that everything will be alright does not change the fact that, in our humanity, we need to respond before God to those present realities that are not alright.

The Psalmist asks, “Why?” and “How long?” but neither question need indicate a lack of hope for an ultimate salvation. Lament is thus not inappropriate as a mode of engaging with God in this now-and-not-yet period. After the death of his son in a climbing accident, Wolterstorff wrote:

Elements of the gospel which I had always thought would console did not. They did something else, something important, but not that. It did not console me to be reminded of the hope of resurrection. If I had forgotten that hope, then it would indeed have brought light into my life to be reminded of it. But I did not think of death as a bottomless pit. I did not grieve as one who has no hope. Yet Eric is gone, *here* and *now* he is gone; *now* I cannot talk with him, *now* I cannot see him, *now* I cannot hug him, *now* I cannot hear of his plans for the future. *That* is my sorrow. A friend said, “Remember, he’s in good hands.” I was deeply moved. But that reality does not put Eric back in my hands now. That’s my grief. For that grief, what consolation can there be other than having him back?...

I have no explanation. I can do nothing else than endure in the face of this deepest and most painful of mysteries. I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and resurrector of Jesus Christ. I also believe that my son’s life was cut off in its prime. I cannot fit these pieces together. I am at a loss. I have read the theodicies produced to justify the ways of God to man. I find them unconvincing. To the most agonized question I have ever asked I do not know the answer. I do not know why God would watch him fall. I don’t know why God would watch me wounded. I cannot even guess.... My wound is an unanswered question. The wounds of all humanity are an unanswered question.

There will be times in which psalms of individual and communal lament will be the appropriate way of relating to the Lord honestly. While we may see lament as an act of unbelief, this is not the case. Lament is not a severing of relationship with God but takes places precisely *within* that relationship.

The lament is the response of one who cares enough to take the meaningless before God. That is an act of faith. To take our honest questions to God is not an act of defamation toward the character of God, but an act of affirmation. Why are there wrongs in this in-between time? Why are they so severe? How long must we endure? These are within the context of faith-struggle in this in-between time. And if Christians can muster at least as much faith as the Old Testament Psalmist and Prophets, then the release of such questions finds its form in the lament.

Elie Wiesel noted that “[t]here is a certain power in the question which isn’t found in the answer.” Lament explores the power of asking the kinds of questions for which adequate answers are hard to imagine. The Lament tradition, says Walter Brueggemann, kept covenant interaction between God and Israel alive. Without lament the human partner in the relationship becomes voiceless in dark times: “covenant minus lament is finally a practice of denial, cover-up, and pretense.”¹¹⁸ God does not require Israel to be “Yes-Men” who only know how to give



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

thanks. Even the dangerous questioning of God's own justice is permitted. "A community of faith which neglects laments soon concludes that the hard issues of justice are improper questions to pose at the throne, because the throne seems to be only a place of praise."

This insight acts as a corrective to a certain pious Christian discomfort with, and distortion of, Lamentations. For instance, St. Gregory's *Pastoral Rule* interprets the profuse weeping in Lam 3:48 as weeping over the defilements of former *sins*, whereas it is actually a lament over the *sufferings* of Zion. This tendency to see repentance where it is not to be found can also be seen in Ambrose, who quotes Lam 2:10–11 to illustrate (along with 1:2, 4, 16, 20) the repentant posture of the elders. Now, in no way do I wish to undermine the importance of repentance (3:40–42), but we need to acknowledge when the tears of lament are tears of pain, frustration, and anger rather than tears of pious repentance. And we need to recognize the legitimacy of such tears.

The giving of voice to sufferers is emphasized by Barbara Bozak. She observes that the experience of powerlessness and the loss of voice are central to many forms of suffering. Laments are the prayers of the disorientated and reflect an honest response to the different aspects of pain (physical, psychological, and social). They can play a role in the process of healing because they can help the sufferer to "find a language of lament, a cry of pain, words which begin to express what is happening in his or her life." There is more to lament, however, than the expression of pain and anger. Will Soll reminds us that "we stop short of a full understanding of the lament psalms if we make them nothing more than a vocabulary of complaint. For the lament is not merely an articulation of unhappiness; it seeks, in the midst of unhappiness, to recover communion with God."¹²³ This is certainly the case in Lamentations. The book was not created simply to express grief and anger at God. It was primarily there to inspire God to bring about a change in Judah's circumstances. In Lamentations the graphic scenes of suffering are there, not merely because the people need to speak their pain, but mainly because the underlying hope is that YHWH is fundamentally a God of compassion: if his attention is drawn to the dreadful suffering, then, it was hoped, he will be moved to act salvifically. Even the articulation of complaint is a step on the way out of the darkness.

While the exact words of Lamentations may not express precisely how we feel because our situations will never entirely parallel theirs, we can still draw inspiration from the brutal honesty of the prayers. We can still relate to the bringing of pain before God and to the conflicting emotions. Indeed, Christians can sometimes lose sight of the certainty of resurrection and can wonder if their future is one of unending darkness. In such places of pain Lamentations can be an inspiration. Christ has been in that place of God-forsakenness too. He has stood in the darkness alongside us and called out our words of lament, "Why have you forsaken me?" Even in the experience of feeling forsaken, God is with us.

To see such a Christian appropriation of Lamentations consider St. John of the Cross's interesting and suggestive use of the *geber's* lament in 3:1–19. The words are understood to describe "the dark night of the soul." He quotes extended sections from those verses on several occasions in which he is detailing the grievous afflictions of this spiritual state. He says that he "can think now of no way to describe this state of oppression, and that which the soul feels and



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

suffers in it, save by using these words of Jeremiah which refer to it.”¹²⁵ Clearly Lamentations 3 was a key biblical text for St. John. “All these complaints Jeremiah makes about these pains and trials, and by means of them he most vividly depicts the sufferings of the soul in this spiritual night and purgation. Wherefore the soul that God sets in this tempestuous and horrible night is deserving of great compassion.” For St. John of the Cross this terrible dark night was intended by God for the *good* of the soul, as painful medicine to bring it to health, but for the soul in this state it is hard to perceive it that way. The soul is

unable to raise its affection or its mind to God, neither can it pray to him, thinking, as Jeremiah thought concerning himself, that God has set a cloud before it through which its prayer cannot pass [Lam 3:44] ... it thinks that God neither hears it nor pays heed to it ... [he then quotes Lam 3:9]. In truth this is no time for the soul to speak with God; it should rather put its mouth to the dust, as Jeremiah says, so that perchance there may come to it some present hope [Lam 3:29], and it may endure its purgation with patience.

The soul can do nothing, not even pray, but be passive; *God* is the one who is working on it.

St. John’s interpretation of Lamentations 3 is helpful. It seeks to take with full seriousness the real horror of the man’s sense of alienation from God and victimization by God. It also seeks to understand those sufferings as intended by God for good not ill, even if they do not feel that way to the sufferer at the time. That interpretation is sensitive to the overall shape of 3:1–39. The interpretation cashes in on the fact that the sufferer in Lamentations 3 is an individual, for the “dark night of the soul” in St. John’s theology is something suffered by individuals, not communities. However, we might wish to extend his thought at this point and consider the cases of a dark night of the soul suffered by an entire faith community. Is that not exactly what we find in Lamentations? Indeed, as Dobbs-Allsopp argues, “It is precisely as a counterweight to the individualism that pervades our culture that Lamentations’ thoroughgoing [communal] choral sensibilities are well poised to serve the church. For Lamentations ultimately crafts and frames its response to catastrophe in and through a communal idiom.”

Finally, there will be some situations in which Christians and churches suffer, not out of loyalty to Christ, but because they have sinned. The New Testament is quite clear that God may execute judgment in the present age on whole churches (Rev 3:16) as well as individuals (Acts 5:1–11; 1 Cor 11:30). In this regard, it is fascinating to see that Eusebius quotes Lam 2:1–2 and applies it to the destruction of churches in persecution in 302/303 A.D. This destruction was, according to Eusebius, due to divine judgment on the churches for internal strife and conflict between leaders who cast aside the bond of piety and acted like power-crazed tyrants. In the persecution, houses of prayer were torn down, Scriptures were burned, church leaders hid and, when caught, were mocked by passers-by. Clearly Eusebius saw situations in which churches suffer *for their iniquity* much as Jerusalem did in Lamentations.

For those Christians experiencing divine punishment for sin, the words of Lamentations will resonate with their own situation. Calvin, in his lectures on Lamentations, certainly felt free to see in the book warnings to his Christian audience of the reality of divine judgment on the church or the Christian that sins in the way Israel did, and also a model of how to lament in a



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

godly way (i.e., without raging against, and blaspheming, God but acknowledging his righteous punishment and humbling ourselves before him). For instance, commenting on 1:17, he writes:

Now, if such a thing happened to the ancient church [i.e., Israel], let us not wonder if at this day also God should deal with us more severely than we wish. It is, indeed, a very bitter thing to see the church so afflicted as to have the ungodly exulting over its calamities, and that God's children should be as the refuse and filth of the world. But let us patiently bear such a condition; and when we are thus contemptuously treated by our enemies, let us know that God visits us with punishment, and that the wicked do nothing except through the providence of God, for it is his will to try our faith, and thus to shew himself a righteous judge: for if we rightly consider in how many ways, and how obstinately we have provoked his wrath, we shall not wonder if we also be counted at this day an abomination and a curse.

In a similar way, Matthew Henry, commenting on Lam 4:1–12, wrote, "Beholding the sad consequences of sin in the church of old, let us seriously consider to what the same causes may justly bring down the church now." And in the nineteenth century Eduard Nägelsbach wrote

Truly, since the Lord could destroy Jerusalem ... without being unfaithful to His promise given to the Fathers, even so He can remove the candlestick of every particular Christian church, without breaking the promise given to the church at large, that the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.

Other Christian writers see the potential applications of Lamentations in similar ways. St. Gregory in his *Pastoral Rule* quotes Lamentations 2:14 about the prophets who don't challenge sinners. Christian leaders, he says, must care for their flock by prophetically speaking out against sinful people. And Gregory is well aware that Christian leaders *do* fail in their callings. The *Pastoral Rule* provides an allegorical interpretation of Lamentations 4:1 in which the dimmed gold is holiness, the changed pure gold is reverence, the stones poured out on the streets are persons in sacred orders and the streets on which they are poured out are the latitudes of life. So the verse is seen to speak of what happens when "a life of holiness is polluted by earthly doings" (gold dimmed) and "when the previous reputation of persons who were believed to be living religiously is diminished" (most excellent color changed); when those who should have been at the heart of the holy place (both the stones from the High Priest's vestments and the building blocks of the temple) seek out the broadways of secular causes outside (the streets).

Charles Spurgeon, preaching on Lam 2:19 just before midnight on New Year's Eve 1855, was inspired to see the narrator's appeal to Zion to weep and plead for her children as reversible in the situation of his day. The sons of Zion must weep and plead for their mother (the church), for she has abandoned sound preaching and gospel truth:

Methinks I might become a Jeremy to-night, and weep as he, for surely the church at large is in almost as evil a condition.... Arise, ye sons of Zion, and weep for your mother, yea weep bitterly, for she hath given herself to other lovers, and forsaken the Lord that bought her. I bear witness this night, in the midst of this solemn assembly, that the church at large is wickedly departing from the living God; she is leaving the truth which was once her glory, and she is mixing herself among the nations. Ah! beloved, it were well if Zion now could sometimes weep; it were well if there were



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

more who would lay to heart the wound of the daughter of his people. How hath the city become a harlot! how hath the much fine gold become dim! and how hath the glory departed! Zion is under a cloud.

The above serve merely to illustrate some of the diverse ways in which Christians have heard the word of the Lord addressed to them through the text of Lamentations.

Having found space within Christian theology for lament we can return to the issue of responding to suffering and ask how Lamentations can guide the Christian *practice* of lament.

Lamentations and the Practice of Theodicy

In his book *Raging with Compassion*, John Swinton argues that seeking to *explain* evil and suffering, in the way Christian theologians and philosophers often have, is both futile and, at times, positively *unhelpful*. A more biblical and pastoral way of responding to evil is not to provide a theoretical account of why it occurs but “rather to develop forms of community within which the impact of evil and suffering [can] be absorbed, resisted, and transformed.” As Wendy Farley comments, “Suffering yearns more for experiences of healing presence than for logical arguments. Theory can provide some meaning to suffering, but it is in compassionate relationship that suffering discovers redemption.” As a practical theologian, Swinton wishes to recommend to the church various Christian *practices* (lament, forgiveness, thoughtfulness, and hospitality) which serve as “practiced acts of resistance” and “gestures of redemption.” The goal of these practices is to help people respond to evil and suffering “in ways that are faith-enhancing rather than faith-destroying.”

The raw psychological impact of suffering—both communal and individual—is scratched into every page of Lamentations. Psychological studies on phases in the grief process and post-traumatic stress disorder in refugees highlight how the poems of Lamentations display a wide range of responses to trauma. We see shock (1:4), denial (3:39), isolation (1:2, 9, 16, 21), anger (2:20), bargaining (2:18–19; 3:40–42), depression (5:15), memories of happier times (1:7), shame (1:8), search for the guilty (4:12–13), laying blame (5:7), weeping (3:48–51), and controlled grief (in the act of writing the poems). It is worth our while to ask what practical strategies the book of Lamentations presents for dealing with catastrophic suffering. Among them one might find the following:

Space for Silence

Lady Zion sits in silence for much of the time as do her inhabitants. Consider 2:10:

The elders of Daughter Zion are sitting down in stunned silence;
They put dust on their heads, they are dressed in sackcloth.
The maidens of Jerusalem press their heads to the ground.

The human response to grief is often one of stunned silence. Swinton points to the often unnoticed fact that Jesus’ six hours on the cross were spent, for the most part, in silence. We so



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

focus on his words from the cross that we miss the significance of the quiet spaces between them.

We can understand the words of Jesus only in the light of his silence. If we are to transform and resist evil, we must understand the imposed silence that accompanies evil and suffering before we can break that silence. We can understand the experience of suffering only when we learn how to listen to the silence, when we learn to interpret and understand the meaning of silence and the dangers of breaking that silence with words that can be harmful even when intended to be healing.... Jesus' silence and alienation legitimate the experience of suffering.

Lamentations, as a book, represents a breaking of the silence—an attempt to articulate a suffering that is beyond words. However, we need to appreciate that the articulation of suffering in the poems in Lamentations was not the *first* reaction to the pain and that the poems recall the initial silence and the ongoing periods of silence. Silence, as Calvin Seerveld notes,

is the mark of a person's being a single, self-conscious, individual creation. This is why when a person is threatened with shame, with public exposure ... when what is closest to one's very self is to be violated, then as a last resort a person withdraws, pulls back into one's cloak of silence, trying to keep intact and out of reach at least something that is one's own.... Silence gives a person room to move around in oneself, [and] presents a reserve for regrouping one's forces.

A Time to Weep

Zion weeps bitterly through the night and sits with tears running down her cheeks (1:2, 16). The inhabitants of the city weep (1:4b–c), as does the narrator (2:11; 3:48–51). The sheer gut-wrenching depth and physicality of this weeping is clear from 2:11.

My eyes were worn out from tears,
My stomach churned.
My liver bile was poured out on the ground.

Articulating Suffering

Lamentations provides some of the words to articulate Judah's grief in the aftermath of Babylonian decimation. It provides long descriptions of the multiple and diverse horrors that are suffered and their impact on the soul of the community. As part of a journey of healing, pain must be named and owned without denying it, comparing it, or trivializing it.

Bearing Witness to Suffering

Zion testifies to those who pass by about what has befallen her (1:12–16, 18–19). In the same way, the narrator acts as a witness to her grief and compels his audience to consider it. The man in chapter 3 bears blunt witness to his pain (3:1–18), as do the community in chapter 5 (5:1–18). Dealing with pain is more than being able to articulate it to ourselves—we need *others* to see and hear to reintegrate us into a wider community.



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

Comforting the Broken

What added insult to Zion's injury was the fact that there was no one to comfort her. Nobody would draw alongside her and sit with her in her sorrow. There was nobody to behold with kind eyes her condition and listen to her lament. The narrator himself is moved to take on this mantle (2:13). The poet knows that those who grieve should have a comforter and uses the poem to invite the readers of the book to play that role. Very clearly then, Lamentations is advocating the practice of weeping with those who weep (Rom 12:15). Practical and heartfelt compassion for those in pain is the way of Lamentations. The characters in the book who look on at Zion's pain and mock (1:21; 2:15–16) are treated as behaving wickedly.

Remembering Suffering

Lamentations, as a book, memorializes the grief of the city, and the ongoing Jewish liturgical use of the book embodies this refusal to forget. The connections we noted earlier between the cup of God's wrath that Judah had drunk and the cup through which Christians recall Jesus' death in Holy Communion are suggestive here. The ritual of the Eucharist compels Christians to remember the broken and tortured body of Christ. Recognizing the solidarity in which Christ stood with suffering Israel and damaged humanity liberates us to see in this cup a space for the remembrance of the brokenness of our world. Of course, Christ's death is unique (only he died for the salvation of creation), but in that death he embraced the fate of humanity. So perhaps the Christian celebration of communion can become a space in which we refuse to forget the "crucifixion" of creation, of humanity, of Israel as we recall how Jesus alone took that judgment *to its limit and exhausted it*. Perhaps Holy Communion could become a time for Christians to "remember" the sufferings of the world in the sufferings of Jesus.

Prayers of Protest and Petition

Wolterstorff wrote that "Lament is more ... than the voicing of suffering. The mere voicing of suffering is complaint, not lament. Lament is a *cry to God*." Lament is a cry for deliverance from suffering ("Save us, Lord"), but also from the threat of meaninglessness that the suffering brings ("Why have you let this happen?"). Lamentations does not turn its back on YHWH but clings to him at precisely this moment of Godforsakenness. This is exemplified best in the narrator's call to Lady Zion in 2:18b–19:

Pour down tears like a torrent, by day and by night!
Do not give yourself rest! Do not let the daughter of your eyes be still!
Arise! Cry aloud in the night at the beginning of night watches!
Pour out your heart like water in front of the presence of the Lord!
Lift up your hands to him for the life of your children fainting from hunger on every street corner!

And Zion does pray (1:9c, 11c, 20–22; 2:20–22). Her prayer is honest about her sin and her pain. It is also angry and confused yet still looks to God for salvation. When all is said and done, Jerusalem's pain is simply too deep for human healing (2:13c). Some evils are *so* horrendous



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

that the only hope for their ultimate defeat is the infinite goodness of YHWH. So it is appropriate that the book of Lamentations climaxes in an extended prayer in which the pain is brought before God and he is asked to intervene (chapter 5).

Remembering God's Covenant Love

The suffering man in Lamentations 3 recalls, in the midst of his sorrow, YHWH's past acts of loving kindness and tender mercy. This recollection revives hope within his hopeless heart even before his situation sees any improvement (3:18–24). The practice of recalling God's past acts of mercy is crucial to empowering sufferers to face their situations with hope, and, for the Christian, the story of the cross, resurrection, and ascension will be at the heart of recollections of God's *hesed*. However, it is important to realize that, before the man could get to this "moment," he spoke very bluntly of God's mistreatment of him. We need to be appreciate that Lamentations gives space for both phases of his response, and we should be careful not to rush with undue haste to remembrance.

Repentance

The community is called to confess its sins (3:40–42), and Zion has a place in her prayer for confession of sin (1:18a). While confession of sin and repentance do not dominate Lamentations, they are practices affirmed in the book. In cases where the suffering is not related to the sin of God's people, then such a practice is not directly relevant.

Humble Submission to God

The location of the teaching of 3:25–39 in the canonical form of the book (its juxtaposition with texts that have other emphases) invites readers to ponder quite how it should be taken. The teaching on handling suffering in 3:25–39, while problematic for many modern readers, received a much more affirmative reaction in Christian history. The advice on the goodness of bearing the yoke *in youth* (3:27) is used by Methodius to support the need to cultivate virtue for childhood. Jerome took 3:28–31 as a description of the vocation of anchorites, who go from the monasteries into the desert with nothing but bread and salt. He traces this vocation back through Paul the hermit, St. Anthony, and John the Baptist to those of whom "Jeremiah" spoke in Lamentations 3. These devout people bear the yoke, sit alone in silence, give their cheek to the one who strikes it, and so on. In Letter XLIX–L.4, Jerome takes "Jeremiah's" exhortation to bear the yoke and sit in silence (3:27–28) as wise advice for a wayward and argumentative monk who was troubling him. Theodoret, commenting on "Good is YHWH to those who hope, to the soul that seeks him" (3:25), writes, "Let us not murmur at the storm that has arisen, for the Lord knoweth what is good for us.... Let us then bravely bear the evils that befall us; it is in war that heroes are discerned; in conflicts that athletes are crowned." Augustine plausibly sees Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount on turning the other cheek (Matt 5:38–39) as simply a reiteration of Lam 3:30, in which a man is praised for offering his cheek to one who would strike him. In all these cases, the "wise" advice in Lam 3:25–39 is taken at face value—positive advice to be followed by the Christian.



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

The teaching is not encouraging passivity on the part of those who suffer (see next point). Rather, they are being invited to construe their suffering as a temporary chastening originating in God. This leads not to a perverse enjoyment of affliction, nor to acceptance of it as good, but rather to an attitude of humble and hopeful patience in the face of it.

Resistance to Suffering

Somewhat in tension with the previous point is the fact that lament in general, and Lamentations in particular, embodies a refusal to accept the current state of affairs. So the man in 3:48–51 declares that he will weep until God acts to save.

My eyes will flow with streams of water,
on account of the destruction of the daughter of my people.
My eyes pour down [tears] and will not stop,
without weakening,
*until YHWH will look down and see
from heaven.*
My eye[s] afflict me
because of all the daughters of my city.

He refuses to accept the way things stand. This is an important element for Christian spirituality. Brueggemann comments:

The lament psalms, then, are a complaint that makes the shrill insistence that: 1. Things are not right in the present arrangement. 2. They need not stay this way and can be changed. 3. The speaker will not accept them in this way, for the present arrangement is intolerable. 4. It is God's obligation to change things. *But the main point is the first: life is not right.*

Opposition to the Perpetrators of Suffering

While God is seen as ultimately responsible for the affliction, human enemies are the immediate cause. Lamentations is very clear in its condemnation of the evil inflicted by these enemies. To repeat a point made several times already, the fact that they are unwitting agents of God in no way mitigates their culpability (1:21–22; 3:58–66; 4:21–22). This gives the lie to the view that a strong doctrine of divine sovereignty necessarily undermines resistance to suffering and evil. While recommending submission to God's strange work through suffering, *Lamentations simultaneously advocates protesting against suffering and resisting that which brings suffering (even if that suffering originates with God).* The enemies are opposed in prayer and through the faithful recounting and exposure of their atrocities.

All of these practices have a place in Christian spirituality, and they are part of the gift of Lamentations to the church.

Ah, my dear angry Lord,
Since thou dost love, yet strike;
Cast down, yet help afford;
Sure I will do the like.



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

I will complain, yet praise;
I will bewail, approve;
And all my sweet-sour days
I will lament and love.⁸

SILENCE

Speaking neither good nor evil, Genesis 31:24.

Silent toward those who insulted, 1 Samuel 10:27.

Stand still, see what God will do, 1 Samuel 12:16.

“Be quiet,” 1 Samuel 15:16 (NKJV).

Nothing to say, Nehemiah 5:8.

Painful silence, Job 2:13.

Wisdom of silence, Job 13:5.

Let others speak, Job 13:13.

Respect for those older, Job 32:4.

Silent meditation, Psalm 4:4 (LB).

Eloquent silence, Psalm 19:3 (LB).

Mute God, Psalm 83:1 (Berk.).

Wise man holds tongue, Proverbs 10:14 (LB).

Wisdom of silence, Proverbs 10:19; 17:28.

Avoid quarrel, Proverbs 11:12 (LB).

Guardian of the soul, Proverbs 13:3.

Silence prevents quarrel, Proverbs 17:14.

Guarding tongue, Proverbs 21:23.

Those who speak in haste, Proverbs 29:20.

Too much talk, Ecclesiastes 5:3.

Dramatic use of silence, Isaiah 36:13–21.

Silence of the Savior, Isaiah 53:7; Matthew 26:57–67; Mark 14:53–62; John 19:8–9.

Futile effort to suppress truth, Jeremiah 38:1–6.

Divine silence, Hosea 3:4 (CEV).

Prudent man’s silence, Amos 5:13.

Silent about the Lord’s name, Amos 6:10.

Prophetic silence, Zechariah 13:1–5.

Demons kept silent, Mark 1:33–34.

Pondering in heart, Luke 2:19.

Cynical tongues silenced, Luke 20:20–26.

Silent witness, 1 Peter 3:1–2.

Musicians put to silence, Revelation 18:22.

⁸ Parry, R. (2010). *Lamentations* (pp. 221–228). William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

*See Tact.*⁹

Silence can be a blessing in one context and a curse in another. We can sit with a loved one in silence all evening, every moment a feeling of security. But if a loved one lies in a coma, or is recovering from surgery, the silence can be terrifying.

God's child can value the silences he experiences. There is a silence of inquiry, when we read God's Word and let it saturate our soul. There is a silence of faith, with our heart suddenly unburdened of incarcerating fears. There is a silence of introspection, when we mentally interrogate our motives and goals in the light of Christ's expectations. There is a silence of intensity, when a worship leader directs our prayer thoughts, focusing them like lasers. There is a silence of awe, when we struggle to comprehend God's majesty, Christ's love, and the Spirit's gentle counsel. What a joy to be still and know that he is God!¹⁰

October 11th

After God's silence—what?

When He had heard therefore that he was sick, He abode two days in the same place where He was. John 11:6.

Has God trusted you with a silence—a silence that is big with meaning? God's silences are His answers. Think of those days of absolute silence in the home at Bethany! Is there anything analogous to those days in your life? Can God trust you like that, or are you still asking for a visible answer? God will give you the blessings you ask if you will not go any further without them; but His silence is the sign that He is bringing you into a marvellous understanding of Himself. Are you mourning before God because you have not had an audible response? You will find that God has trusted you in the most intimate way possible, with an absolute silence, not of despair, but of pleasure, because He saw that you could stand a bigger revelation. If God has given you a silence, praise Him, He is bringing you into the great run of His purposes. The manifestation of the answer in time is a matter of God's sovereignty. Time is nothing to God. For a while you say—'I asked God to give me bread, and He gave me a stone.' He did not, and to-day you find He gave you the bread of life.

⁹ Anderson, K. (1996). [*Where to Find It in the Bible*](#). T. Nelson Publishers.

¹⁰ Hurley, V. (2000). [*Speaker's sourcebook of new illustrations*](#) (electronic ed., p. 214). Word Publishers.



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

A wonderful thing about God's silence is that the contagion of His stillness gets into you and you become perfectly confident—"I know God has heard me." His silence is the proof that He has. As long as you have the idea that God will bless you in answer to prayer, He will do it, but He will never give you the grace of silence. If Jesus Christ is bringing you into the understanding that prayer is for the glorifying of His Father, He will give you the first sign of His intimacy—silence.¹¹

October 11

God's Silence—Then What?

"When He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was" (John 11:6).

Has God trusted you with His silence—a silence that has great meaning? God's silences are actually His answers. Just think of those days of absolute silence in the home at Bethany! Is there anything comparable to those days in your life? Can God trust you like that, or are you still asking Him for a visible answer? God will give you the very blessings you ask if you refuse to go any further without them, but His silence is the sign that He is bringing you into an even more wonderful understanding of Himself. Are you mourning before God because you have not had an audible response? When you cannot hear God, you will find that He has trusted you in the most intimate way possible—with absolute silence, not a silence of despair, but one of pleasure, because He saw that you could withstand an even bigger revelation. If God has given you a silence, then praise Him—He is bringing you into the mainstream of His purposes. The actual evidence of the answer in time is simply a matter of God's sovereignty. Time is nothing to God. For a while you may have said, "I asked God to give me bread, but He gave me a stone instead" (see Matthew 7:9). He did not give you a stone, and today you find that He gave you the "bread of life" (John 6:35).

A wonderful thing about God's silence is that His stillness is contagious—it gets into you, causing you to become perfectly confident so that you can honestly say, "I know that God has heard me." His silence is the very proof that He has. As long as you have the idea that God will always bless you in answer to prayer, He will do it, but He will never give you the grace of His

¹¹ Chambers, O. (1986). *My utmost for his highest: Selections for the year*. Oswald Chambers Publications; Marshall Pickering.



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

silence. If Jesus Christ is bringing you into the understanding that prayer is for the glorifying of His Father, then He will give you the first sign of His intimacy—silence.¹²

A BRIEF SILENCE IN HEAVEN

REVELATION 8:1

¹When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

HISTORICIST

Elliott identifies this **silence** with the short period during which the 144,000 were sealed in the previous chapter. It represents the brief interval between the opening of the seventh seal and the first barbarian invasion to be seen in verse 7. This interval is thought to be “the seventy years that intervened between Constantine’s victory over Licinius, followed by the dissolution of the pagan heavens, a.d. 324, and Alaric’s revolt and the invasion of the empire, consequent on the death of Theodosius, a.d. 395.” Elliott calculates that **half an hour** in heaven is precisely equivalent to seventy years of Roman history.

Albert Barnes writes that the half-hour silence was for effect to mark the solemnity of the events about to be reported, i. e., those resulting from the sounding of the seven trumpets (chs. 8–11). These events follow chronologically after those recorded in the earlier visions. “Of course, this is a symbolical representation, and is designed not to represent a pause in the events themselves, but only the impressive and fearful nature of the events which are now to be disclosed.”

Matthew Henry suggests two possible meanings of the silence in heaven: (1) that there was a brief period following the destruction of Jerusalem during which no complaints from the saints (as found in 6:9–10) were presented in heaven because all was temporarily peaceful for the church on earth. This silence was soon broken by the renewed prayers of the saints for relief from additional trials (8:3–5); or (2) that this is “a silence of expectation.... The church of God, both in heaven and earth, stood silent, as became them, to see what God was doing, according to that of Zech. 2:13, *Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord, for he has risen up out of his holy habitation.*”

PRETERIST

The brief **silence** in heaven contrasts sharply with the noise of praise and song that characterized the heavenly scene in chapters 4 and 5. Conspicuously missing are the “loud voices” of the

¹² Chambers, O. (1992). *My Utmost for His Highest: An Updated Edition in Today’s Language* (J. Reimann, Ed.; pp. 284–285). WORDsearch.



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

martyrs inquiring how long it would be before they were avenged (6:10). Perhaps their cries have ceased because the requested vengeance upon their persecutors, the leaders of the Jews, had now commenced. For a short time, symbolically represented as **half an hour**, there would be no more such complaints heard in heaven. Soon, however, new persecutions of Christians by Rome would cause the righteous blood to again cry for vindication. This may be what is portrayed symbolically in the following verses, where prayers of the saints again are offered as incense to God. The “half hour” may be the period of time normally required by the priest in the temple to offer the daily incense. This “time of incense” was a time of silent prayer for the attendant worshipers (Luke 1:10, 21). This would accord with the description of the ceremony by Alfred Edersheim. In this case it is an angel in heaven, not a priest in the temple, who is offering the incense (v. 5).

FUTURIST

Concerning this interval of **silence**, Walvoord writes:

Contained in the seventh seal are all the subsequent developments leading to the second coming of Christ, including the seven trumpets and the seven bowls of the wrath of God ... [this silence] may be compared with the silence before the foreman of a jury reports a verdict; for a moment there is perfect silence and everyone awaits that which will follow.

Ryrie observes:

With the opening of this last seal the book is now fully opened, and one would expect a holocaust to let loose. Instead there is silence.... This is a silence of expectancy, for this is the last seal. It is also a silence of foreboding that precedes the onslaught of judgments. It lasts for half an hour (which may be understood just as literally as the other time designations in the book).

SPIRITUAL

For a short time (symbolized by **half an hour**), heaven is in awestruck silence, anticipating the completion of God’s purposes. It is the lull before the storm. Hailey points out that “[a] half hour is ordinarily a short period of time, but it seems long when one is waiting.”

What follows this silence is the blowing of seven trumpets, recalling the fall of Jericho at the blast of seven trumpets. It should be remembered that Jericho’s fall also was preceded by a period of silence, as the Israelites circled the city seven days without a sound.

REVELATION 4–7 SUMMARY: THE SEVEN-SEALED SCROLL

The Lamb and the scroll are introduced to the reader in the vision of chapters 4 and 5. In some respects, this opening vision is more attention-getting than the events that follow, revealing, as it does, the throne of God in heaven and His unusual



attendants enthusiastically worshipping Him for His holiness and His creative and redemptive acts. Not until the fifth chapter is John's attention drawn to the scroll in the hand of God, the contents of which are concealed by seven seals. A call goes forth throughout the universe for a champion to come and break the seals and open the scroll. Initially, none is found qualified to open the scroll, causing John great dejection. At the crucial moment, Christ appears, depicted as a slain Lamb, and takes the scroll from the hand of God on the throne. All the inhabitants of heaven rejoice because one has finally come who is worthy to break the seven seals and open the scroll. They burst into praise and adoration as the Lamb prepares to break the seals. Chapter 6 marks a major change in the action, as the Lamb successively breaks the seven seals which had formerly prevented the opening of the cryptic scroll. Wild and terrifying things then begin to transpire, beginning with four ominous horsemen, and do not let up until nearly the end of the book.

The adherents to the four approaches do not agree about the time frame or import of this dramatic vision. Even those within each individual camp often disagree with reference to the details of interpretation. Those of every persuasion are inclined to see the principal significance of this throne-room vision as an affirmation that God is sovereign over all and that the events which follow are the direct results of His righteous decrees. Most also agree that this vision underscores the unique qualifications of Christ to judge the wicked, based upon His sacrificial death. There is a wide range of opinions—not necessarily divided along the lines of the four approaches—about the exact identity of the scroll. Leading *historicists* take it to represent "the purposes and designs of God" or simply, "future events." To some *preterists* it is the sentence of the judge being handed down for execution, and to others it is the document representing the New Covenant. *Futurists* typically see the sealed scroll as the title deed to the earth, to be reclaimed by Christ in the final seven years of history. *Spiritual* interpreters have alternately identified it as "the redemptive plan of God" or "God's last will and testament."

Where the four approaches divide most sharply, of course, is in the timing of the earthly events which result from the breaking of the seven seals.

Historicists spread the fulfillment of the prophecies of the whole book over the entire age of the church and connect this breaking of the seals with events occurring early in the history of the church. Some take the breaking of the seals back as far as the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (in this instance agreeing with the early-date *preterists*). On this view, the breaking of the seven seals concerns the judgment of the Jewish commonwealth in the late sixties A.D., culminating in the doom of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The more characteristic view among the *historicists* associates the breaking of the first seal with the death of Domitian (A.D. 96) and identifies the breaking of the other seals with events marking the rise of the Western Roman Empire and its degeneration, extending to the invasions of Goths and Vandals in the fourth and fifth



centuries. The 144,000 sealed saints are the spiritual Israel (the Church), preserved by God through these political upheavals.

Early-date *preterists* agree with those *historicists* who see the seal-breaking as fulfilled in the fall of Jerusalem. They point out the unmistakable similarities between the images used here and those of the Olivet Discourse (Mark 13, and par: Matthew 24; Luke 21:5–36), in which Jesus predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. The 144,000 represent the Judean Christians, who fled from Jerusalem prior to the siege and thus escaped the holocaust.

Futurists see in these chapters the beginning of the end-time Tribulation. The four horsemen represent the rise of Antichrist, followed by global calamities in the form of war, famine, and death. The 144,000 are Jews converted during the Tribulation. Dispensationalists believe that the church will already have been raptured, so these Jewish believers are a part of Israel, not the church.

Spiritual interpreters do not look for specific single fulfillments of the visions in Revelation. The four horsemen depict the recurring historic phenomena of conquest, war, famine, and death, without reference to any particular cases. Alternatively, the first horseman might depict Christ's gospel riding triumphantly through the earth. The point is that such events are sent into the world at the command of God and function as a part of His redemptive and retributive plan. The martyrs seen in heaven remind us that those in every age who have suffered for Christ will be vindicated, and the 144,000 represent the church throughout history.

Though the four approaches do not fully agree upon every detail of interpretation, there is not radical disagreement about the issues depicted in the opening throne room vision of chapter 4. Differences of general approach, however, begin to emerge in chapter 5 and become more conspicuous in chapter 6.¹³

5950 silence

¹³ Gregg, S. (1997). [*Revelation, four views: a parallel commentary*](#) (pp. 138–142). T. Nelson Publishers.



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

A stillness or absence of noise, often associated with the absence of life or people, but also associated with a sense of expectancy or reverence, especially in the presence of God. Scripture stresses that God is not silent, but for fulfillment of OT prophecy.

The silence of God

His apparent silence in the face of sin Ps 50:21 *See also Job 34:29; Isa 42:14; 57:11*

God will not remain silent in the face of sin Ps 50:3 *See also Isa 62:1; 65:6-7*

Prayers that God will not be silent Ps 28:1 *See also Ps 35:22; 39:12; 83:1; 109:1; Isa 64:12; Hab 1:13*

God silences those who oppose him

1Sa 2:9 *See also Ps 8:2; 63:11; 107:42; Isa 25:5; 47:5; Jer 47:5; 48:2; 51:55*

Jesus Christ's opponents were silenced by his miracles and wisdom: Mt 22:34; Mk 3:4; Lk 20:26
Ac 4:14; Ro 3:19

The silence of Jesus Christ

It was foretold in the OT Isa 53:7 *See also Ac 8:32*

Its fulfillment in the NT Mt 26:63 pp Mk 14:61 before the Sanhedrin; Mt 27:14 pp Mk 15:4-5 pp Jn 19:9 before Pilate; Lk 23:9 before Herod

Jesus Christ commands silence as a sign of his authority

Mk 1:25-26 pp Lk 4:35 *Jesus Christ silenced evil spirits; Mk 4:39* *Jesus Christ silenced the storm.*

There are times when it is appropriate for God's people to be silent

The silence of expecting God to act Jos 6:10 *See also Ge 24:21; Ex 14:14-15; 2Ki 2:3,5; Rev 8:1*

The silence anticipating the wisdom of another person Job 29:7-10,21

The silence of prudence Pr 10:19; Ecc 3:7 *See also 1Sa 10:27; Job 13:5; 33:31-33; Pr 11:12; 17:28*

The silence of suffering La 3:28 *See also Ps 39:9*

The silence of shame Eze 16:63

The silence of anger Ps 4:4 *The psalmist is warning against hasty action when angry.*

The silence of amazement at God's actions *See also Lk 9:36; Ac 15:12*

A tongue-speaker should be silent if no interpreter is present 1Co 14:28 *silence in the church; 1Co 14:30* *A prophet should be silent if another receives a revelation.*

Christian women are sometimes exhorted to be silent 1Ti 2:11-12 *See also 1Co 14:34-35; 1Pe 3:1-4*



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

There are times when it is inappropriate for God's people to be silent

When there is good news to tell 2Ki 7:9; Ps 40:9

When much depends upon a person's words Est 4:14 *See also* Jer 4:19; 20:9; Ac 18:9-10

When God should be praised Ps 30:11-12 *See also* Lk 19:37-40

When sin is unconfessed Ps 32:3

When God's people feel they have a genuine complaint Ps 39:1-2 *See also* Job 7:11; 23:16-17

When prayer is urgently required Isa 62:6-7

God's people are sometimes brought to silence

Job 31:34 *Job fearing the crowd*; **Eze 3:26** *Ezekiel as a judgment on Israel*; **Mk 9:34** *the disciples when their pride was exposed*; **Lk 1:20** *Zechariah because of his unbelief*

Silencing the wicked

Believers pray that the wicked will be silenced Ps 31:17-18; 1Pe 2:23 *See also* Ps 143:12

Believers so live that the wicked may be silenced Tit 2:8; 1Pe 2:15

False teachers must be silenced

Tit 1:10-11 *"the circumcision group" believed that in order to be saved it was necessary to be circumcised and keep the Jewish ceremonial law.*

Death is compared to silence

Ps 94:17; 115:17¹⁴

SILENCE — the absence of noise or sound. The word silence is used in the Bible to symbolize death (Ps. 94:17) and SHEOL (Ps. 115:17). Silence can express a mood of gloom and despair, as after the destruction of Jerusalem (Lam. 2:10). Silence can also express fear and reverence: "The LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him" (Hab. 2:20).¹⁵

¹⁴ Manser, M. H. (2009). [*Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies*](#). Martin Manser.

¹⁵ Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., & Harrison, R. K., Thomas Nelson Publishers, eds. (1995). In [*Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary*](#). Thomas Nelson, Inc.



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

SILENCE

Dallas Willard is author of *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* and philosophy professor at the University of Southern California.

Silence is a crucial spiritual discipline for American Christians today. Contemporary life also makes it one of the most difficult to practice.

Silence is, in every time and place, an essential way of breaking free from the grip of a world turned away from God and his kingdom—a world that neglects the soul. In our time in particular, the ever-present noise of modern existence and the overwhelming barrage of relentless “communications” militate against living in divine presence.

Silence has two closely related dimensions. One involves evading noise or intrusive sounds. These reach deeply into our body and keep it (and us) at a constant low level of alarm. The other has to do with avoiding talk, which, without the spiritual depth of love, proves to be little more than another type of intrusive sound (1 Cor. 13:1).

The discipline of silence consists in the practice of abstaining, for significant periods of time, from noise and from talking. We step aside from them to allow development of attitudes and habits that can constantly hold us, with thankful hearts, in the loving presence of God.

Silence can be cultivated in many ways. For the novice, it is helpful to experience a retreat center, where the practice of silence is understood and accommodated. Then, families blessed with similar inclinations may practice silence in community at home. Silence must never be imposed, but practicing it together in a loving atmosphere is incredibly enriching and rewarding. As we progress in our habits and understanding of how silence works, the exercise of this discipline will depend less and less on circumstances. We will always need to return periodically to concentrated forms of the practice such as we have in a retreat center or other special arrangement. Even in a retreat or escape, though, the aim is to establish silence in the soul, a nourishing and sustaining reality.

Silence well practiced opens a living space in which we can be effectively attentive to God, to our own souls, and to the genuine needs of those around us. The apostle Paul directs us, “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear” (Eph. 4:29, NASB). James says, “If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man” (3:2). One cannot be like that by trying.

However, one can become the kind of person who is like that. A wise and seasoned practice of silence does much to bring it about.



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

It is up to us to choose silence and other practices of spiritual discipline that enable us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). The discipline of silence has substantially advanced multitudes in that “grace and knowledge.”¹⁶

Paul S. Rees:

The Service of Silence

Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still (Ps. 4:4).

Other translations prefer the word “silence.” For our noise-dumb age could anything be more timely? A silence pregnant with God makes you feel that even one audible word would be sacrilege. What then is the service of these quiet yet creative interludes in the life of God’s child? Think of such silence as:

I. *An Aid to Memory.* When we are still, the past comes back to haunt, perhaps to humble, or to make us happy. In the psalm when David is quiet his memory goes to work. He looks back on troubles at the time seemingly unbearable, but troubles that have left him a bigger man, with a richer soul and a finer faith. Yes, silence is the setting in which memory has its best chance, and does its noblest work.

II. *A Response to Mystery.* Before any mystery, “Stand in awe, and sin not.” Among the mysteries consider the holiness of God. Do we stand in awe of his holiness? “As he who has called you is holy,” cries Peter, “so be ye holy in all matters of conduct.” There is a hushed response that should be evoked by the unsullied holiness that our poor eyes behold in God. This response is a part of worship, of penitence, of sensitive discipleship. In the presence of such mysteries how useful to be silent! When no other response is ready, “in silence reflect.”

III. *A Form of Ministry,* not least to ourselves. Without some such concern against evil, and protest against it, something is missing from our moral fiber. Silence is even more a form of service to others. In another sometimes a hurt is too deep for words; it calls for loving silence. Often I have gone to a funeral parlor, or to a home, to face a friend to whom grief has just come. My first ministry there has been with no smoothly turned sentences, no glib and conventional

¹⁶ Willard, D. (2013). [Silence](#). *Christianity Today*, 57(2), 47.



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

condolence. No, just a clasp of my hand and whatever of Christ's tender care I could convey with my eyes. When a heart is throbbing with its most acute anguish it is not speech that is needed, but our Lord's healing silence.

IV. *A Symbol of Mystery*. When Christ hung upon the cross, how did he reply to cruel taunts? With a silence so noble and noteworthy that the centuries reckon with it as sublime. Like the Saviour we too can not escape occasions when the noblest weapon of moral dignity is silence.

Silence! Let no one think it useless! Give it a larger and a more meaningful place in your soul. Whatever you do, don't treat Christ with such carelessness and flippancy that he can return you nothing but his awful and dooming silence. His silence to you can be terribly fatal. Your silence to him may be tremendously fruitful.—From *Evangelical Sermons of Our Day*, ed. by A. W. Blackwood (Manhasset, N. Y.: Channel Press, 1959).¹⁷

DAY SIX

Silence: Waiting for God's Word

We are silent in the early hours of each day, because God is supposed to have the first word, and we are silent before going to sleep, because to God also belongs the last word. We are silent solely for the sake of the word, not in order to show dishonor to the word but in order to honor and receive it properly. Silence ultimately means nothing but waiting for God's word and coming away blessed by God's word.... Silence before the word, however, will have its effect on the whole day. If we have learned to be silent before the word, we will also learn to be economical with silence and speech throughout the day. There is an impermissible self-satisfied, prideful, offensive silence. This teaches us that what is important is never silence in itself. The silence of the Christian is a listening silence, a humble silence that for the sake of humility can also be broken at any time. It is a silence in connection with the word.... In being quiet there is a miraculous power of clarification, of purification, of bringing together what is important. This is a purely profane fact. Silence before the word, however, leads to the right hearing and thus also to the right speaking of the word of God at the right time. A lot that is unnecessary remains unsaid.

Today is Remembrance Sunday. Will you have a memorial service for B. Riemer? It would be nice, but difficult. Then comes Advent, with all its happy memories for us. It was you who really opened up to me the world of music-making that we have carried on during the weeks of Advent. Life in a prison cell may

¹⁷ Rees, P. S., Sangster, W. E., Rees, P. S., Kirkland, B. M., Hartner, H. G., & Blackwood, A. W. (1963). [The Minister's Workshop](#). *Christianity Today*, 7(16), 787.



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

well be compared to Advent: one waits, hopes, and does this, that, or the other—things that are really of no consequence—the door is shut, and can only be opened *from the outside*.

Letter from Bonhoeffer at Tegel prison to
Eberhard Bethge, November 21, 1943

For God alone my soul waits in silence,
for my hope is from him.
He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not be shaken.
On God rests my deliverance and my honor;
my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.
Trust in him at all times, O people;
pour out your heart before him;
God is a refuge for us.

*Psalm 62:5–8*¹⁸

Silence

Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.
Proverbs 17:28 ESV

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

The chief priests accused him of many things. So again Pilate asked him, “Aren’t you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of.” But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

Mark 15:3–5 NIV

When he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.

Revelation 8:1 KJV

It is in silence that God is known, and through mysteries that He declares Himself.

Robert Hugh Benson

¹⁸ Bonhoeffer, D. (2010). *God is in the Manger: Reflections on Advent and Christmas* (J. Riess, Ed.; O. C. Dean Jr., Trans.; First edition, pp. 12–13). Westminster John Knox Press.



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

We are silent at the beginning of the day because God should have the first word, and we are silent before going to sleep because the last word also belongs to God.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Mere silence is not wisdom, for wisdom consists in knowing when and how to speak and when and where to keep silent.

Bishop Jean Pierre Camus

In silence a man can most readily preserve his integrity.

Meister Eckhart

How can you expect God to speak in that gentle and inward voice which melts the soul, when you are making so much noise with your rapid reflections? Be silent, and God will speak again.

François de la Mothe Fénelon

One reason we can hardly bear to remain silent is that it makes us feel so helpless. We are so accustomed to relying upon words to manage and control others. If we are silent, who will take control? God will take control; but we will never let him take control until we trust him. Silence is intimately related to trust.

Richard J. Foster

Our safest eloquence concerning him is our silence, when we confess without confession that his glory is inexplicable, his greatness above our capacity and reach.

Richard Hooker

Be silent about great things; let them grow inside you. Never discuss them: discussion is so limiting and distracting. It makes things grow smaller. You think you swallow things when they ought to swallow you. Before all greatness, be silent—in art, in music, in religion.

Baron Friedrich von Hügel

The Father uttered one Word; that Word is his Son, and he utters him for ever in everlasting silence; and in silence the soul has to hear it.

St John of the Cross

Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and to remove all doubt.

Abraham Lincoln

God is the friend of silence. Trees, flowers, grass grow in silence. See the stars, moon, and sun, how they move in silence.

Mother Teresa

Silence is not much preached today, so it is for prayer to preach it. If we do not listen we do not come to the truth. If we do not pray we do not even get as far as listening. The four things do together: silence, listening, prayer, truth.



The Advent of Silence
WNC 11.22.2023
©Orleen Haseltine
it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

Hubert van Zeller¹⁹

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Being Silent Before God and Resting in Prayer

So there is a special rest still waiting for the people of God.

HEBREWS 4:9, *NLT*

In the previous chapter, we mentioned that in order to listen to the voice of God, we first have to be quiet before God. In today's world, that can be difficult to accomplish at times. We have over 100 channels on our TV sets that blare programs and commercials throughout the day—and DVD players and TiVo to record anything that we might have missed. We can chat with others online (even people we don't know) and communicate to anyone in the world through e-mail. And of course, we carry cell phones with us that allow us to talk with our friends at any time of the day.

But does "more" communication necessarily mean "better" communication? Do greater opportunities to communicate directly corollate to receiving more meaningful content? In fact, the opposite appears to be true. We communicate more but say less than ever before. Why is this? Because we are empty within. We have very little to say, so when we listen or read we have very little with which to interpret what we take in.

Are we addicted to words? Are we compulsive talkers? What about our prayer life? Do we pour out an abundance of words to God? Probably not. Even when we talk a lot to God, we are usually asking Him for things ... a solution to a problem ... some money ... to change someone else.

¹⁹ Manser, M., ed. (2016). [*Christian Quotations*](#). Martin Manser.



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

David wrote, “I wait quietly before God, for my salvation comes from him” (Ps. 62:1, *NLT*). What does it mean to wait quietly or silently before God? It means to *rest* in the presence of God and wait for Him to speak to us and to manifest His presence. We don’t ask for anything, nor do we strive in intercession. We rest not because we’re tired—even when we’re physically exhausted—but because we just want to be in the presence of God. We quit striving and worrying and just enjoy the peace that being in the presence of God brings.

THE POWER OF SILENCE

Do you know that there is power in silence? The power of silence comes not from the absence of words but from presence of God. When we are silent before God, the Lord can heal us, or build us up, or make us what He intended for us to be: “My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him” (Ps. 62:5).

Being still and resting in God’s presence pleases our heavenly Father, for when we control our words, we also control our thoughts and actions. James wrote, “No one can tame the tongue. It is an uncontrollable evil, full of deadly poison” (Jas. 3:8, *NLT*). Our words reflect the anger in our hearts, reveal our sin, project our greed and tell everyone that we are selfish and vain. But when we control our words, we become the disciplined people that God want us to be: “But those who control their tongues can also control themselves in every other way” (3:2, *NLT*). Silence reflects the beginning of our self-discipline and reveals that we are a follower of God.

Silent or “wordless” praying is a learned art and a skilled discipline. There is a difference between art and skill: Art comes naturally, while skill must be developed through training and repetition. The art of silence comes from within because our renewed souls passionately seek the presence of God. The discipline of silence, however, is something that we must constantly practice and strive to obtain, because it is natural for us to want to talk. But when we finally learn silence, we will begin to know and relate to God.

Silence is difficult because often it may seem as if nothing is happening. We sit and rest in silence, waiting to hear from God ... and grow impatient when the words don’t immediately come. But does communication only occur through words? Think about two people in love. They may not say a word—or even be thinking anything substantial—but by their very silence they communicate love, contentment and happiness to each other. It takes a long time to fall so deeply in love with someone that this type of communication is possible. In the same way, it takes a long time to learn to successfully pray without words.

Silent prayer can also be difficult because it reveals the attitude of our hearts. When we come silently to God, He shines the light of His glory into our souls and we realize that we can’t offer any excuses for our failures or rationalize away our sin. In the silence, we comprehend that He knows everything about us and that there is nothing we can hide from Him. Silence forces us to receive conviction for our sins, criticism for our actions, and correction for our bad decisions. But as we examine our hearts in our silence, God reveals how we can change our lives and become better people. And we will find rest in God.



SILENCE AND SALVATION

John Wesley, the famous Methodist preacher, decided to commit his life to the Lord after listening to a reading of Martin Luther’s preface to Romans at a meeting on Aldersgate Street, London. He later recounted his experience:

In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

Notice that Wesley states that his heart was “strangely warmed” but doesn’t tell us what he prayed to get saved—or even that he prayed at all. His conversion was not centered around prayers made up of words but rather reflected the experience of his heart.

An old Methodist preacher who I once knew used to say “I know that I know that I know” when asked about how he was certain that he was a child of God. Why did he say “I know” three times? Well, he knew in his *head* that he was saved because he read it in his Bible. He knew in his *heart* that Christ had saved him because he had experienced Jesus coming into his life. And the old Methodist preacher just innately knew *deep inside* that he was a child of God. It was a comprehension deeper than mere head knowledge, or emotional feelings, or even words. Just as the preacher knew that fire was hot and water was wet, he knew that he had been forgiven.

Most of us don’t like to talk this way because we have been taught not to base our salvation on our feelings. But this knowledge that comes from deep within represents more than just feelings—it represents *faith* in God. Feelings and facts may waver, but faith will never slip. Faith is an assurance that God places deep within our hearts.

The aged apostle John reinforced this concept when he stated, “I write this to you who believe in the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13, *NLT*). So, silent prayer may be a fact of expressing faith. When we come silently into the presence of God, by faith we know where we are and in whose presence we stand. By faith, we’re not blown about by every wind of doctrine or by every storm of emotion (see Eph. 4:14–15). We know that the world, the flesh and the devil are out to get us, but we stand silently in the presence of God and upon the Word of God.²⁰

¹si•lence \ 'sī-lən(t)s\ *noun*

[Middle English, from Anglo-French, from Latin *silentium*, from *silent-*, *silens*] 13th century

1: forbearance from speech or noise: MUTENESS—often used interjectionally

²⁰ Towns, E. L. (2006). [*How to Pray: When You Don't Know What to Say*](#) (pp. 189–192). Regal; Gospel Light.



2: absence of sound or noise: STILLNESS <in the *silence* of the night>

3: absence of mention:

a: OBLIVION, OBSCURITY

b: SECRECY <weapons research was conducted in *silence*>

²**silence** *verb transitive*

si•lenced; si•lence•ing 1598

1: to compel or reduce to silence: STILL <*silenced* the crowd>

2: to restrain from expression: SUPPRESS

3: to cause to cease hostile firing or criticism <*silence* the opposition>

si•lenc•er \ 'sī-lən(t)-sər\ *noun*

1600: one that silences: as

a chiefly *British*: the muffler of an internal combustion engine

b: a silencing device for small arms

¹**si•lent** \ 'sī-lənt\ *adjective*

[Middle English *syilent*, from Latin *silent-*, *silens*, from present participle of *silēre* to be silent; akin to Gothic *anasilan* to cease, grow calm] 15th century

1 a: making no utterance: MUTE, SPEECHLESS

b: indisposed to speak: not loquacious

2: free from sound or noise: STILL

3: performed or borne without utterance: UNSPOKEN <*silent* prayer> <*silent* grief>

4 a: making no mention <history is *silent* about this person>

b: not widely or generally known or appreciated <the *silent* pressures on a person in public office>

c: making no protest or outcry <the *silent* majority>

5: UNPRONOUNCED <the *silentborn* in doubt>

6: not exhibiting the usual signs or symptoms of presence <a *silent* infection>

7 a: made without spoken dialogue <*silent* movies>

b: of or relating to silent movies—**si•lent•ly** adverb—**si•lent•ness** *noun*

synonym SILENT, TACITURN, RETICENT, RESERVED, SECRETIVE mean showing restraint in speaking.

SILENT implies a habit of saying no more than is needed <the strong, *silent* type> . TACITURN

implies a temperamental disinclination to speech and usually connotes unsociability <*taciturn* villagers> . RETICENT implies a reluctance to speak out or at length, especially about one's own affairs <was *reticent* about his plans> . RESERVED implies reticence and suggests

the restraining influence of caution or formality in checking easy informal conversational exchange <greetings were brief, formal, and *reserved*> . SECRETIVE, too, implies reticence but

usually carries a suggestion of deviousness and lack of frankness or of an often ostentatious will to conceal <the *secretive* research and development division> .

²**silent** *noun*



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

1929: a motion picture made without spoken dialogue—usually used in plural²¹

Silence is to dwell in

an hour of quiet is a rare gift, hard to come by in an ordinary week, even for those who seek it

BY MARILYN CHANDLER McENTYRF

SOMEWHERE ON THE DUSTY SHELF OF BOOKS

I read to my children when they were young is a little volume called *A Hole Is to Dig*. Each charmingly illustrated page declares the purpose of something: “A pile of leaves is to jump in.” “A mud puddle is to slide in and go ‘Oodlee-oodleoo!’ ” And so on. The reasoning is sound, if you’re a child. The world is made for our general entertainment; it gives us things to do and pleasures to revel in. There’s something rather poignant about reading the book as an adult, having developed a much more pragmatic sense of the purposes of things like holes (to fill in before someone trips and sues you) or piles of leaves (to put into plastic bags before the Thursday pickup) or mud (to be scraped off boots before stepping on the carpet).

The same pragmatism that turns a tired and jaundiced eye toward holes and mud seems to inform the liturgical sensibility reflected in churches I’ve attended of late, on the purpose of silence. Silence, it seems, is to be filled.

I suppose we inherit this sense of silence as “dead air time” from radio and TV, where every second of time not pulsing with a voice or image is “lost” or “dead.” Silence, like prime time and airwaves, has become a commodity to be bought, sold, filled, framed, and obliterated: a “nothing” that must be made into a “something.”

Our church bulletin, preserving some vestige of antique decorum, still reminds us in italics just above the “Words of Welcome” that we may use the minutes before the service to “gather ourselves for worship in silence.” Oddly, though, this kindly invitation seems to be the one printed rubric that is routinely ignored. Not only is that time of “silence” filled with music (and I would be the first to attest that the right sort of music can in fact create or enhance an awareness of silence), it also seems to have given way by tacit consent to community check-in rituals. The buzz of greetings, appraisals of visiting in-laws, brunch invitations, and admonitions to restless children may be a form of community-building, but for the odd introvert who craves a moment to open and air out interior space for the Word to inhabit, it has the same effect as screen snow: there’s no program to enjoy, no way to turn off the TV, and no silence to dwell in.

We are people of the Word, in the best sense. The Word of God proclaimed in worship is a healing word, and hearing, a means of salvation. But we are also a people who have filled aural and visual space with endless chatter. Few of us, who do not spend our days in monasteries or

²¹ Merriam-Webster, I. (2003). In [*Merriam-Webster’s collegiate dictionary*](#). (Eleventh ed.). Merriam-Webster, Inc.



live in rural retreats, can imagine the silences our grandparents lived with. We have normalized the white noise of refrigerators and idling motors, the beat of the neighbor's boombox, the hyperbolic jangle of commercials and the indecorous whispers of pewmates who have learned by incessant, insidious conditioning that silence is to fill. Our occasional efforts to reclaim a few minutes of silence in the midst of the ambient noise we regard as normal demand strenuous deliberation. (A few hearing-aid companies are quietly capitalizing on this minority market by building better earplugs.) And so the spoken Word must constantly compete for our diffused attention.

Perhaps it would help us to hear more regularly the story of Elijah on Mount Horeb, waiting for the Lord to pass by. The Lord, you remember, was not in the great wind, or the earthquake, or the fire, but, as the NRSV translates it, in the "sound of sheer silence." The church's long history of contemplative practice seems to suggest that there is some knowledge of God that can come only in stillness—silence large and long and intentional enough to open a sacred space for the Holy One to enter. To fill up that silence—even with what seems harmless, hospitable chatter or with the preoccupations of perpetual responsibility—forecloses some possibility of intimate encounter with the Word who speaks in "sheer silence."

One of the strongest arguments for dialogue among U.S. denominations is that, having so differently developed forms of worship, we may remind one another of what we may have allowed to atrophy. "High-" and "low-church" worshipers have something to teach one another about liturgy and fellowship. And "mainline" congregations might do well to consider what gifts of the Spirit are being preserved among more "marginal" communities like the Quakers.

These sturdy nonconformists, the Society of Friends, have something both countercultural and revitalizing to teach us about how to create, inhabit, and listen in corporate silence. To sit with several dozen people in the deep, consensual silence of meditation and prayer can be a powerful experience of invitation and consent. Even before the words of prayer form in the mind, we are made aware of the Real Presence that is promised wherever two or three are gathered in his name. What is spoken in those meetings falls into a pool of silence and spreads like ripples that move and inscribe but do not disturb the deep stillness.

An hour of such silence is a rare gift, hard to come by in an ordinary week, even for those who seek it. Several years ago, I was told by an amused friend who worked for a large corporation about a coworker's effort to still one bit of unnecessary noise. Having received several complaints about the invasive Muzak that filled the ears of the hapless folk on hold, the in-house phone managers replaced the tunes with this message: "Your call has been received and a representative will be with you as soon as possible. In the meantime, silence will be provided." I think something so rare should be reckoned a significant charitable gift to the public. I would like, at any rate, to offer the anecdote as a challenge to churches: it's not our job to compete with the corporate world, but we might find a ready market if we became places where silence could be provided.²²

²² McEntyrf, M. C. (2000). [Silence Is to Dwell in an Hour of Quiet Is a Rare Gift, Hard to Come by in an Ordinary Week, Even for Those Who Seek It](#). *Christianity Today*, 44(9), 62–63.



The Advent of Silence
WNC 11.22.2023
©Orleen Haseltine
it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

A SILENCE OF FEAR

CONSIDER THIS Habakkuk 2:20

Hab. 2:20 is sometimes used as a call to worship. It urges reverent silence before the Lord as He dwells in His holy temple.

However, the context shows that the silence which all the earth is to keep is a silence in light of God's judgment, not merely the respectful silence of a worship service. The Lord has just pronounced five "woes" on Babylon (2:6–19), indictments for which He will bring the nation down.

The only appropriate response to this warning is fearful silence (compare 3:2). Mighty Babylon is going to be judged. There is nothing for the rest of the world to say. A holy God is having the last word.²³

The Practice of Silence

The Teacher, like other sages in Scripture, urges his readers to be quick to listen but slow to speak (Eccl 5:1–3; cf. Prov 10:19; 17:27; James 1:19, 26; 3:1–13). An ancient Jewish commentary on Ecclesiastes 5:2 cites Psalm 65:1 to state that silence is praise (see NASB). This is one of many indications that there was an old tradition of the "sanctuary of silence" practiced by priests who prayed silently as they carried out their responsibilities in the temple and also in posttemple times (Knohl).

For a number of years, this writer attended a Mennonite Brethren church in Oklahoma that made space for several minutes of silence in every Sunday morning worship service. I found myself looking forward to and enjoying those times of deliberate quiet in the company of other believers. We calmed ourselves and listened for what God might say—either in the silence or in the words that came later. In a culture of noise and distraction, Qohelet's words remind us of our need to be calm and still before God (Ps 46:10), both in times alone and in times together. Silence then becomes a positive presence rather than the lack of something, and a gift to us within our tumultuous existence.²⁴

Silent with a Corpse

²³ [Word in life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., Hab 2:20). (1996). Thomas Nelson.

²⁴ Miller, D. B. (2010). [Ecclesiastes](#) (pp. 101–102). Herald Press.



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

Job has torn his robe in mourning (1:20), and they too tear theirs. And they “sprinkled dust on their heads toward heaven” (v. 12). Dust speaks of mortality and death. God says to cursed Adam, “You are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19). Joshua and the elders of Israel tear their clothes, fall to the ground, and put dust on their heads after the disaster at Ai (Joshua 7:6). The Israelite who reports the capture of the ark by the Philistines comes to Shiloh with his clothes torn and with dirt on his head (1 Samuel 4:12). After Tamar has been raped by her half-brother Amnon, she tears her clothes and puts ashes on her head, mourning for her lost future (2 Samuel 13:19).

To throw dust in the air (toward Heaven) so that it falls on their heads is vividly to identify themselves in their grief with Job’s dead children and probably also with Job himself, who has been grasped by death and is already being dragged down into the realm of the dead. Job is to them like a friend being sucked down by quicksand in the desert; they long to draw him up, but he is beyond their reach. He is as good as dead.

“And they sat with him on the ground” (v. 13). They do not sit on a carpet or on cushions but directly on the ground. The ground is the place of the dust of death; it is the closest men on earth can get to Sheol. After the sack of Jerusalem, “The elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground in silence; they have thrown dust on their heads and put on sackcloth” (Lamentations 2:10).

Then comes silence, seven days and seven nights of silence! “They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.” Job’s suffering was, as we shall see, deeper than merely physical. It was made sharper by mental and spiritual grief. It was an anguish and an agony. This man who had been a very great man (1:3) now suffers a very great suffering.

What are we to make of this silence? It is at best ambiguous. Preachers often say that this long silence was the best thing that they did. And certainly, as we shall see in chapter 4, when they begin to speak they do no good at all. So one writer concludes, “If for the most part Job’s friends got things wrong ... here, at the beginning, they do it right.” “Here is genuine friendship. Here is deep ministry.” He calls this “the compassion of a silent presence.” Another says, “Their silence is a further expression of their genuine empathy.” Others say, “They do honour by profound silence to his vast grief,” for “when grief is so crushing, what form but silence can sympathy take?” “They were true friends, bringing to Job’s lonely ash-heap the compassion of a silent presence.”

But while their silence may initially have been appropriate, it seems unlikely that it continued so. To sit quietly with a sufferer, to hold his or her hand, to listen patiently as he or she pours out his or her grief is one thing. But this silence is “hugely extended.” To refuse to speak a word to a sufferer for seven days and seven nights is eerie and not comforting. It is interesting that we are told they did not speak a word “to him” (v. 13). For all we know, they may have spoken with one another. So it may not have been silence after all, but just a refusal to speak to Job, which is quite another thing.

Even if it was total silence (which seems more likely), a seven-day silence symbolized mourning for the dead. It is what Joseph did for his father Jacob. It is what the loyal city of



Ramoth-Gilead did for King Saul (1 Samuel 31:13). “Job’s friends mourn for him as one already dead.”²⁰

It is as if they call for the hearse and sit by Job with the coffin open and ready for him. There is no point talking to a corpse; one just weeps by it. To them Job is no longer a living person. Their silence may be not so much a silence of sympathy (although it may have begun as such) but a silence of bankruptcy. They say nothing because they have nothing to say that will bring him comfort. It seems to them too late for that.

The Loneliness of Suffering

Whatever the meaning of their silence, the book of Job brings home to us the loneliness of suffering²⁵

PEACE (hold one’s)

1. *sigao* (σιγάω, 4601) signifies (a), used intransitively, “to be silent” (from *sige*, “silence”), translated “to hold one’s peace,” in Luke 9:36; 18:39; 20:26; Acts 12:17; 15:13 (in v. 12, “kept silence”; similarly rendered in 1 Cor. 14:28, 30, κιν, “hold his peace,” 34); (b) used transitively, “to keep secret”; in the passive voice, “to be kept secret,” Rom. 16:25, RV, “hath been kept in silence.” See SECRET, SILENCE.

2. *siopao* (σιωπάω, 4623), “to be silent or still, to keep silence” (from *siope*, “silence”), is translated “to hold one’s peace,” in Matt. 20:31; 26:63; Mark 3:4; 9:34; 10:48; 14:61; Luke 19:40; Acts 18:9; in the Lord’s command to the sea, in Mark 4:39, it is translated “peace” (for the next word “be still” see No. 4); in Luke 1:20, RV, “thou shalt be silent” (κιν, “dumb”). See DUMB, B. ¶

3. *hesuchazo* (ἠσυχάζω, 2270) signifies “to be still”; it is used of holding one’s “peace,” being silent, Luke 14:4; Acts 11:18; 21:14, “we ceased. See CEASE, A, No. 3, QUIET.

4. *phimoo* (φιμώω, 5392), “to muzzle,” is used metaphorically in the passive voice, in Mark 1:25 and Luke 4:35, “hold thy peace”; in Mark 4:39, “be still.” See MUZZLE.²⁶

Revelation **8:1 The seventh seal** on the scroll (5:1) is **opened**, finally allowing it to be unrolled. **Silence in heaven for about half an hour** seems to mark a brief but significant break between the unsealing of the scroll (6:1—8:1) and the trumpet judgments (8:6—11:19). This silence is broken only by a heavenly offering and “the prayers of all the saints” (vv. 3, 4). It is, however, the eerie silence before the storm as all of heaven awaits the coming judgment.

8:2 The judgments of the **seven trumpets** unfold in a pattern parallel to the unsealing of the seven-sealed scroll (6:1—8:1). This has led some to conclude that both describe the same time

²⁵ Ash, C. (2014). *Job: The Wisdom of the Cross* (R. K. Hughes, Ed.; pp. 61–62). Crossway.

²⁶ Vine, W. E., Unger, M. F., & White, W., Jr. (1996). In *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Vol. 2, p. 464). T. Nelson.



period from different angles, but greatly increased severity of the trumpet judgments makes this unlikely. The sounding of a trumpet had more than one significance in the Old Testament. It was used to gather the Lord's people (see Num. 10:7, 8), to assemble the Lord's army (see Num. 10:9), to announce a new king (see 1 Kin. 1:34–39), and to proclaim the Year of Jubilee (see Lev. 25:9). In this context, the sounding of trumpets indicates a declaration of war.

8:2–5 The seven angels who stand before God are likely “the angels of the seven churches” (1:20). The **prayers** of God's **saints** seem to have a part in the judgment of God. The **censer** is a firepan used for burning **incense**. The **golden altar** reflects the splendor of the heavenly throne room (4:2, 3). *Incense* here may speak of the fragrance of the infinite perfections of Christ that accompanies the prayers of all the saints or is mingled with their prayers. The addition of this incense is necessary to make our prayers acceptable before the throne. In breaking the silence in heaven (v. 1), the prayers of God's people for God to act in just judgment (6:10) are heard and responded to with **noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake.**²⁷

Three Degrees of Inner Work

Monastics have this support. We observe the Rule together. When one comes into a monastery it should be easy to see the life in common with shared things, common table, and worship in the assembly. The schedule (*horarium*) is a requirement of membership to be taken seriously. Permission is necessary if one is to be absent. More important than observance is practice. Each of the observances requires a particular discipline. This inner work is the work of the monastery. The training is for group practices to protect the solitude that is conducive to do this inner work.

When one comes to the monastery, the cloister, or the retreat house, one enters into the practice of silence. The setting provides the solitude that protects and gives boundaries to the practice of silence. Within the practice of silence, we discipline the thoughts of the mind (*praxis*). This *praxis* is about our thoughts: what we are doing with our minds while we practice silence in the observance of solitude. These three concentric degrees of inner work is the work of the monastery. We specialize in this inner life, the spiritual journey.

So there are three concentric circles or degrees of work for the sake of this contemplative life:

1. Observance is what people see and is something done for the sake of the silence.
2. Practice is the inner discipline done within the observance.
3. *Praxis* is the training of the mind that we do while we are doing the practice within the observance.

²⁷ Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1997). [*The Nelson Study Bible: New King James Version*](#) (Re 8:1–5). T. Nelson Publishers.



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

Examples: Silence and Statio

In the cloister we “observe” silence. This ritual is seen by others. Within this observance is the “practice” of silence: we set aside designated times, places, and degrees of restrictions to honor the solitude. And within the practice of silence is the *praxis* of stillness. *Praxis* is what one does with one’s mind that governs thoughts and emotions. *Praxis* would be stillness of mind and body. Both the mind and the body require discipline of thoughts. Thoughts matter! The digital consciousness of where to direct the mind’s eye stills the stream of mental images and the ever-shifting movements of the body. Sensations are noticed but not heeded, both in the mind and in the body. When guests come to a retreat at Beech Grove, we request compliance with the norms of silence in the solitude of the monastery. Then we give training on how to still the mind and emotions as well as how to still the body (*praxis*).

Another such example of observance, practice, and *praxis* is *statio*. We stand outside of the church and line up, maintaining silence (observance that one can see from the outside). Before processing into church for Vespers we listen to the tolling bells (practice of place, ritualized gestures in actual time). With our mind, we practice recollection, reining in all our senses and bringing our thoughts to stillness, emptiness (*praxis*). With each toll of the bell, we ride out the thoughts to come to that place of the present moment when we are ready to enter the temple of worship.

The teaching on practice and *praxis* is important for this third dimension of *lectio divina* because just inserting ourselves into the observances of the contemplative culture won’t save us. We must train our mind to enter into the practices with assiduous *praxis*. *Lectio divina* is an encounter with God but first we must wake up and encounter ourselves and redirect our thoughts away from self and toward God’s way for us.

These three concentric circles work from outer to inner, conversely. Without the outer observance, there is no structure to protect the practice. The practice is the connecting tissue to provide matter for the mind. *Praxis* without the practice would be nominal, or simply mind-only manipulations that tend to reify reality. We think things exist and so they do. So we need all three: *praxis*, practice, observance, or we can start with observance, practice, and *praxis*. The embodiment of these three solid traditional means of contemplative life is the monastic way of life. This is not to say that lay life cannot be contemplative, but it does raise the serious question about structures to steady the practice and give form so the *praxis* becomes a habit. The culture of the world often opposes this inner work of prayer.

The method for both monastic and lay contemplatives is *lectio divina* to provide an alternative culture to the world. We see that this third dimension, the dynamic ascetical life, takes a lifetime. This is done consciously and ceaselessly. There is never a time when we are awake that we are not attending to our practices. This third dimension with the moral voice is our personal willingness to relate to God. It moves our personal desires into an actual, loving relationship with God. This is prayer. To expect prayer to be abiding and effective without a moral life is disconnected with being a human person. We have many pulls away from a moral life because of our human condition, yet God’s grace is sufficient. So, to work backward, first, I confessed my



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

sins and put behind me personal sin. Then we seek an environment conducive to the moral life to stay in a wholesome relationship with ourselves, others, and God.²⁸

The world officially rejects the Messiah

The legal charge

The timing

The trial before Pilate takes place early in the morning (v. 1, *prōi*), the final time reference in the series listed in the parable of the doorkeeper (13:35), which has sustained the expectation of the coming of the Son of Man. With the passing of the previous time notes without the arrival of this event, this final moment is filled with heightened expectation. The chapter will end, however, with these expectations still unfulfilled.

Some have argued that the expectation of the coming of the Son of Man is fulfilled in the cross, which is taken to represent Jesus' enthronement at God's right hand as his eschatological judge. The New Testament, however, consistently speaks of Jesus' exaltation to heaven as the moment when he sits at the Father's hand in fulfillment of Psalm 110. In addition, the narrative of Mark encourages the expectations associated with the Son of Man to continue beyond the crucifixion scene. There is no vindication in this scene. One of the tensions in the account is that Jesus is now declared to be king, but there is no evidence of his kingdom in this tragic moment. At his burial, Joseph of Arimathea is said to be 'waiting for the kingdom of God' (15:43), and, in narrative terms, this continues the expectations the narrative has already set up for the kingdom to arrive with power (1:15; 9:1). If Joseph still waits for it, then it has not yet arrived. This is also reinforced by the fact that the resurrection scene is introduced by a repetition of the final time reference, stressed by several other phrases to indicate that this is the moment of dawn. This time, in the resurrection, the Son of Man comes, and, in his resurrection from the dead, the kingdom of God has come with power.

To return to 15:1, Mark, instead of introducing the moment of the coming of the Son of Man, introduces the destructive sacrilege and the last great suffering before the coming of the resurrection.

The handing over

After condemning Jesus at their own preliminary hearing (14:53–65), the Jewish leaders hold a consultation with Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish governing body in the land, before handing their prisoner over to the Roman governor, Pilate (15:1).

²⁸ Funk, M. M. (2013). [*Lectio Matters: Before the Burning Bush*](#) (pp. 67–70). Liturgical Press.



The Advent of Silence

WNC 11.22.2023

©Orleen Haseltine

it is silent.

Even if it is an Advent of Silence...it does not mean

The charge

Pilate's question, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' (15:2, NRSV) dominates the narrative to follow (vv. 2, 9, 12, 18, 26, 32; Lightfoot 1935: 148). This is the charge that will be nailed to the cross, above Jesus' head (15:26), declaring to the world why he had been executed. Historically speaking, Jesus was condemned as the pretended king of the Jews. This shows that Pilate correctly understood the Jewish title 'the Christ', but he presented it in kingship terms to suit Gentile understanding. The Romans were the ones who permitted and refused kingship to those under their domain.⁶

During the trial Jesus makes only one statement, and it comes in response to this question. 'Are you the King of the Jews?', asks Pilate, to which Jesus replies: 'You say so (*sy legeis*)' (NRSV). Since only the Romans could appoint or depose kings, Jesus' reply allows Pilate to decide the case—which he does, for this now becomes the charge nailed over Jesus' head when he is killed (15:26). The representatives of the Jews had tried Jesus for being 'the Christ' (14:61), and now the representative of the nations declares Jesus to be 'King of the Jews', the Messiah. In doing so, Pilate unwittingly declares Jesus to be the king over the nations as well, for, according to Old Testament expectation, that also is the Messiah's role.

The sentence

Because Pilate wanted to satisfy the crowd—now whipped up by the jealousy of the religious leaders (v. 10)—even though he appears to declare Jesus innocent (v. 14), he accedes to their demand, and hands Jesus over to that most wretched of all deaths, crucifixion.

The meaning

For those with eyes to see, when read against some key Old Testament passages, the details of the trial reveal some profound theological truths about the meaning of the cross.

Handing over to the Gentiles

As we saw in chapter 2 above, to hand someone over to the Gentiles is to hand them over to the wrath of God. When the Jewish Sanhedrin decides to hand Jesus to the Gentile governor, they are handing the king of the Jews over to divine judgment.

The Messiah given to the wrath of God

Jesus goes to his death as the result of a legal decision made by the properly constituted governing bodies of his day, namely, the Sanhedrin and the Roman governor. This places Jesus' death in a forensic setting. If we can take a lead from Luke in Acts 4:23–28, this scene can be explained as a fulfilment of Psalm 2. Here we see the people of God joining forces with the nations of the world, in an act of rebellion against the Lord and his Messiah. In this scene, the whole



world, both Jew and Gentile, officially rejects the Messiah¹¹ and hands him over to the wrath of God.

This act, in turn, therefore indicts the world for its sin, for 'no-one who lays a hand against the Lord's anointed can remain guiltless' (1 Sam. 26:9; cf. 1 Sam. 24:6, 10; 26:11, 23; 2 Sam. 1:14, 16), and those who do stretch out their hands against the Lord's anointed deserve to die (1 Sam. 26:15–16). Psalm 2 speaks of this rebellion as being futile, an action that is liable to arouse the wrath of the true king. When read against this backdrop, the crucifixion of Christ by the representatives of both Jews and Gentiles demonstrates humanity's supreme sin and establishes our corporate guilt.

The silence of the servant

Pilate is amazed that Jesus does not defend himself against the many accusations levelled against him (vv. 3–4). This silence is like that of the innocent sufferer in the Psalms, who is silent because of his faith in God (cf. Pss. 22, 31, 69). 'Jesus, like the righteous sufferers of old (Ps. 38:11–15; Isa. 50:5–6; 53:7–9; compare 1 Pet. 2:22–23) faces His torment without snivelling or pathetic efforts at self-defence, without abusing His tormentors, and without complaint to God. His silence means that His attitude is one of trust in the Father' (R. H. Smith 1973: 333).

In particular, his silence shows that he is the servant of the Lord and his death is on behalf of others. Consider Isaiah 53:7 (NRSV):

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

For those with eyes to see, Jesus' silence entails the other aspects of the servant's role: his vicarious, sin-bearing death, which will ransom many; the pouring out of the blood of covenant, which would bring forgiveness of sins and rescue from the grave into the kingdom of God.

The imminence of the kingdom of God

The constant repetition of the term 'king' also taps into the narrative's major concern with the kingdom of God. The suffering of the Son of Man was the last event in God's eschatological timetable that had to occur before the arrival of the kingdom (9:9–13). If Jesus is now designated as the king just as he is handed over to his suffering, does this mean that the much-expected kingdom of God is about to arrive?²⁹

²⁹ Bolt, P. G. (2004). *The Cross from a Distance: Atonement in Mark's Gospel* (D. A. Carson, Ed.; Vol. 18, pp. 117–121). Apollos; InterVarsity Press.