

Spiritual and Carnal Weapons.

by Horatius Bonar

The sermon explores the themes of God's silence, despair in the face of adversity, and the importance of faith and reverence towards God.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 28:5

Topics: "God's Silence", "Faith in Despair"

Description

Horatius Bonar explores the tragic narrative of King Saul's despair when faced with the Philistine army, emphasizing God's silence in response to Saul's inquiries. Saul's fear leads him to seek counsel from a medium, illustrating the dangers of turning away from God in times of crisis. Bonar highlights the perils of backsliding, the dreadfulness of God's silence, and the evils of despair, urging believers to trust in God even when He seems silent. The sermon also contrasts Saul's actions with the faith of Obed-edom, who welcomed the ark of God into his home, receiving blessings despite the failures of Israel. Ultimately, Bonar calls for a deeper understanding of God's dealings and the importance of receiving Him with faith.

Transcript

When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart. He inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets. Saul then said to his attendants, "Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her." "There is one in Endor," they said. 1 Samuel 28:5-7

"And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets. Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that has a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, there is a woman that has a familiar spirit at Endor." - 1 Samuel 28:6,7

The scene of this sad strange narrative, is the plain of Esdraelon, a place of battle-fields. The Philistines are in the north, at Shunem. Israel at the south, in Gilboa. It is a critical hour for Saul, and for his people. The enemy is in strength; Samuel is dead; Saul's conscience is not at ease; he has provoked the Lord; how shall he face the enemy? "He is afraid, and his heart greatly trembles." He knows not what to do. He does, however, the right thing so far: he consults God. But this inquiry is in vain. "The Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets." Then in his despair he betakes himself to the woman with the 'familiar spirit'. Thus heaven, earth, and hell are brought before us. A little of the veil is drawn aside, and we learn something of the workings of the invisible as well as of the visible. We notice,

(1.) God's silence; (2.) Saul's despair.

I. GOD'S SILENCE. Saul in his terror cries, but there is no answer of any kind. No dream of the night reveals the secrets of the future; no prophet comes instead of Samuel; no voice comes from the high priest. All is silent. Silent just when utterance was most desired and needed. Saul knocks at the gate of heaven, but it is barred against him; there is no response. That silence, how dreadful! The roar of thunder, the crash of the earthquake, the rush of the hurricane would have been a relief- though terrible in themselves. But that silence, it is absolutely intolerable. It is the silence of heaven; the silence of Him whose voice was so anxiously expected. We read of the silence of the desert, the silence of midnight, the silence of the church-yard and the grave; but this is something more profound and appalling: the silence of God when appealed to by a sinner in his extremity. There must be a meaning in that silence. It is not the silence

(1.) of indifference;

(2.) nor of inability to hear;

(3.) nor of weakness;

(4.) nor of perplexity.

God is alive to the case; he can hear; he is able to deliver; he knows what would meet the case. Yet he is silent. It must then be the silence of refusal, of rejection, of displeasure, of abandonment. Terrible silence! Anything would be better than this. Such is the position in which God represents the sinner at certain times: "When they call I will not answer" (Proverbs 1:28); "I will not be inquired of by you" (Ezekiel 20:31). The foolish virgins going for oil too late; the knocking for admittance too late; the crying "Lord, Lord", too late; the calling to the rocks and hills in the great day. The only answer is silence!

Oh, dreadful silence for the sinner! He would not call when he would have been heard, and now it is too late! God called on him during his lifetime, but he would not hear. Now he calls, but God keeps silence. Yet even this awful silence will be broken. God will speak; He will speak from the throne. "Depart, you cursed!" will be the breaking of the silence, and the answer to the rebel's cries!

II. SAUL'S DESPAIR. Danger presses; the Philistines are mustering; the crisis has come. Yet there is no answer. What will he do? There were three courses open to him:

(1.) he might sit down in quiet hopelessness, and let the evil come; or (2.) he might, in faith and penitent submission, commit the whole matter to God, even amid this awful silence: or (3.) he might betake himself to hell for counsel since heaven was deaf.

He chooses the last! In his despair he goes to the enemy of that God who was refusing to answer; he turns to the wizards whom he had himself put away; he turns from the living to the dead; he consults with hell. It must have been a dreadful day of suspense for Saul; a dreadful night, when having formed the fatal purpose, he sets out across the hill to Endor. What his thoughts and feelings were in that awful hour we know not. They must have been of the wildest and gloomiest kind. "God has cast me off, I will betake myself to Satan; heaven's door is shut, I will see if hell's be open." And when crossing the hill, and approaching the village of the enchantress, he must have felt, "Now I am going on an errand to Satan; I am going to try if he can do for me what God will not."

Oh terrible journey! Fit winding up to that silence and suspense! He is determined to get a glimpse of the future, though his prophet be the evil one himself. The past is dark; the present is gloomy; what is the future to be? God will not tell him. Will Satan? Thus he rushes on in despair- he the king of Israel, the friend of Samuel, the conqueror of Israel's enemies- the forty years' monarch and warrior, who has never trembled before an enemy- he, the tall, stately Benjamite. Thus, in melancholy madness, he moves in that dark midnight, over the heights that overlooked his own camp and that of his foes.

What a picture! Nothing in Milton is half so grand or sad- hardly anything out of hell is half so terrible- as this man of war, and might, and commanding stature, striding on over these hills to the gate of the pit! His despair had blinded him; he had not learned to say with one who was a greater sufferer than himself, "Though he slays me, yet will I trust in him." He despaired because God was silent. Yet the silence was meant to lead him to repentance and acknowledgment of sin. It was God's last appeal to his conscience. Let us learn,

1. THE PERILS OF BACKSLIDING. Here is one who once bid fair, whom God favored and honored; the friend of Samuel, turning his back on God.
2. THE TERRIBLENESS OF THE SILENCE OF GOD. It means something dreadful: it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God; to cry and get no answer; to find no light!
3. THE EVILS OF DESPAIR. No sinner here ought to despair. His case may be sad; God's silence long and deep; his sins many; yet on no account let him turn his back on God; rather let him fling himself into His arms. This would be blessed despair!

JEWISH UNBELIEF AND GENTILE BLESSING

"The ark of the Lord remained in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite for three months, and the Lord blessed him and his entire household." - 2 Samuel 6:11

It was into the house of a Gentile that the ark was brought; a Philistine; a dweller in Gath; a "Gittite;" but one who knew the Lord God of Israel. It was the sin of an Israelite that led to its being brought here. Uzzah offended and was slain. He was afraid to trust the ark to take care of itself. He laid distrustful hands upon it when the oxen stumbled. Perhaps this was not his first offence of this kind. He seems to have been forward; perhaps proud- proud of his office.

It was David's unbelief that brought it. He did not rightly interpret God's dealing; and was afraid; afraid of God, because He was holy, and ready to vindicate His holiness. He began the work, but broke it off in the midst, through fear- unbelieving fear. He dreads danger to himself; but, strange, he does not so for Obed-edom. He was willing that Obed-edom should run the risk which he would not. In what a strange conflict of feelings this was done! There is more of unbelief and less of faith in David than we would have expected.

He thrusts the ark into Obed-edom's house, that whatever ill might happen might fall on him. It was not in love to Obed-edom, nor with a design of honoring him, nor with the wish to confer blessing on him. None of these motives seem to have influenced David; but blind fear- a wish to keep himself out of danger. He does not seem to have cared about this Gentile; it would seem as if he were saying, If there is danger, let it fall on a Gentile. He does not seem to have meant it for good to him, yet good came. The ark of the God of Israel came to Obed-edom. It knocked at his door seeking shelter, seeking a home. He received it

gladly. He was not forgetful to receive this stranger; and truly he received an angel unawares. He seems to have been a man of faith, one who knew the God of Israel- who knew Him even better than did Israel's king! When David, in terror, would have nothing more to do with the ark, Obed-edom opened his door and bid the God of Israel welcome. Truly it might be said, "I have not seen such great faith, no, not in Israel."

In this unexpected way, blessing entered this Gentile house; no, God Himself entered, and with Him all blessing. It was but a transient stoppage of the ark, a three months' sojourn; but God Himself had taken up His abode, and He would not depart. No doubt all kinds of blessing came in, temporal and spiritual; and these did not leave. What a gainer Obed-edom became by this failure of David! Through David's fall, salvation came to this Gentile! God was not unrighteous to forget his work of faith. Verily he had his reward. It was a high one. David was a loser, but Obed-edom was a gainer. Jerusalem was a loser, but Gibeah was a gainer! Thus wonderful are the ways and works of God! Now turn to the lessons.

I. HOW GOD PUNISHES IRREVERENCE. It was irreverence in Uzzah to put forth his hand. God had provided for the carrying of the ark by Levites. He will not allow this to be encroached upon. He will not permit men to do evil that good may come; or to be judges of what is right, when He Himself has spoken. Beware of irreverence in the things of God; irreverence in church; in touching holy vessels; irreverence as to the name, or book, or day of God. Woe to the irreverent! They are Uzzahs, and shall know it at length, though they be long spared.

II. HOW GOD'S PEOPLE MISINTERPRET HIS DEALINGS. David did so. He shrank from the ark; he dreaded it; he shrank from God; he dreaded Him; he went back to Jerusalem without that for which he had specially gone forth; all through misconstruing this judgment upon Uzzah and his irreverence. God in smiting Uzzah did not mean to repel or terrify David; He merely wished to warn- to check undue familiarity. David in haste and unbelief supposed it to mean that God was frowning upon him- that God was a hard Master- eager to take advantage of every slip or stumble. Thus David wronged Jehovah.

III. HOW MUCH THEY LOSE BY THIS MISINTERPRETATION. Professing to shun Uzzah's presumption, they fall into David's unbelief; and like David they lose the honor and the blessing which might have been theirs. Such is the way in which hundreds lose the blessings of the Gospel. They misinterpret God and His dealings; they flee from Him, they doubt Him, they suspect Him; and so peace is lost, fellowship is lost, God Himself is kept out of the soul.

IV. HOW MUCH THEY GAIN WHO RECEIVE GOD SIMPLY. While David was the loser, Obed-edom was the gainer. He was not afraid of God. The ark came knocking at his door asking admittance, and he gladly received it. And with the ark, God came in, and with God all blessing. Everything prospered in his house now that God had come in. See how God can overrule the unbelief and failures of his people.

1. Beware of flying from God, or shutting out God. He comes to you and knocks; be you Jew or Gentile. Do not be alarmed. It is a friend, not an enemy.

2. Let in God. Both into heart and home. Let God dwell in you and in your house. Bid Him welcome. Do not be forgetful to entertain Him. He comes in love. Fury is not in Him. He is seeking entrance for Himself, and shelter for His ark among the sons of men. Let Him not pass by your door. Go out to meet Him, and bid Him welcome. He will bless you.

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