

Easter (1988) - the Silence of Christ

by Mariano Di Gangi

The sermon explores the profound silence and suffering of Jesus as the Lamb of God, emphasizing his sacrifice for humanity's sins and the promise of his exaltation.

Duration: 30:15

Scripture: Isaiah 53:7, Matthew 5:1-2, Matthew 23:27-28, Matthew 26:59, Luke 23:34, John 1:29, Romans 8:32

Topics: "Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He emphasizes that Jesus experienced intense physical and emotional pain, showing that he was a real human being who suffered for our sins. Despite having the power to call upon angels or perform miracles, Jesus chose to endure the suffering and oppression without speaking out. The preacher also highlights the biblical view of the cross, explaining that Jesus became the substitute for our sins, allowing us to experience both justice and pardoning grace. The sermon concludes with a reference to a hymn by Wesley, urging sinners to behold the lamb of God and proclaim his righteousness and saving grace.

Transcript

During these Sunday evenings, leading up to Good Friday and Easter, the particular focus of our meditation has been the 53rd chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah. And this is a portion of scripture in which we have seen portrayed by the Lord's servant, the Christ who was to come. And here we have a description of the suffering of the Messiah, the sorrows of the Messiah, the sacrifice of the Lord's Christ.

And this evening we come to consider the silence of Jesus. Our text is found in Isaiah 53, beginning at verse 7. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

By oppression and judgment he was taken away, and who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living, for the transgression of my people he was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. This is a text where the prophet, focusing on the Christ who was to come, speaks of him in terms that are related and almost parallel in many cases.

He speaks of him as being oppressed and afflicted. He describes him as a lamb and as a sheep. He speaks of his death and of his burial.

And each of these combination of terms calls for our reverent inquiry as to what they mean and what we can learn from them concerning our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. He was oppressed and afflicted. He was exposed to the severest sort of pain, pain of body, anguish of soul, troubling of spirit.

All of these things are narrated in the gospel story so that we might understand that we do not worship the figment of someone's imagination, but a God who, taking real humanity to himself, has scars in his hands and feet and side and upon his brow to show the reality and the intensity of his suffering. He was oppressed and he was afflicted. He could have called 10,000 angels.

He could have worked a mighty wonder. The authority to do it was his. The power to perform it was also his.

He would multiply loaves and fishes. He would open the eyes of the blind and unstop the ears of the deaf and unloose the tongue of the dumb. He would draw near and raise the dead.

But when it came to his own exposure to pain, when it came to experiencing oppression and affliction, he did not exercise his authority. He did not draw upon his power. He was oppressed and he was afflicted.

He had come into the world not to do his own will, but the will of the father. The words of Psalm 40 characterize his entire career as the Messiah here upon the earth. Lo, in the volume of your book it is written of me, I delight to do your will, O my God.

He came to do the father's will and he came to do it no matter what the cost. And the cost was not to be reckoned in terms of gold or silver. The cost was to be reckoned in the giving of his very life.

He was oppressed and he was afflicted, vulnerable, exposed to the severest pain, not exercising his authority, not drawing on his power, but committing himself willingly to do the will of the father no matter what it cost. We know from the context of our text that his oppression and his affliction had to do with sin. For sin is an offense against the majesty of God.

Sin is an assault against the holiness of God. Sin deserves the judgment of God. And in order that you and I might be forgiven, he was willing to be oppressed and afflicted to take upon himself both the sin of man and the judgment of God.

But he paid the penalty in full. And if we trust in him, we know that he did it for us. Oppressed and afflicted.

But the scripture also describes him in terms of a lamb and of a sheep. A lamb led to the slaughter, a sheep dumb before its shearers. He who is for us the good shepherd, the great shepherd of the sheep, he who gives his life for the sheep, he who has other sheep beyond the narrow confines of the limits that we draw, other sheep that he must and will bring into his fold, he who is the shepherd of Israel is here described not as shepherd but as a sheep.

A sheep that is sheared. A sheep that is shorn and remains silent. Have you ever thought of Jesus Christ as a sheep that is shorn, parted from everything that belonged to him? They took from him his robe.

And at the foot of the cross, crude, rude soldiers gambled for the garments of a God made man. They took from him his freedom. For he who's got the whole world in his hands found that his hands were bound together and he was blindfolded and buffeted and treated as a common criminal.

They took from him not only his possessions and his freedom but his reputation. For witnesses were willing to perjure themselves and they were so crooked that they couldn't even agree among themselves as to the charges that they would bring but they were determined to assassinate his character. And they sheared away from him not only his possessions and his freedom and his reputation but his very life.

For the prophet looking down the corridor of time predicts that he will be cut off out of the land of the living. As a sheep done before its shearers. And as a lamb led to the slaughter.

We're all familiar with the words of John the Baptist. That man of courage, that rough-hewn preacher who called things exactly as they were. That prophet of God who was faithful to the Lord who sent him even if it meant that he had to confront those in high places and called their sin, sin.

How that one day looking upon Jesus he tells his listeners and he points his followers to Jesus. Behold the Lamb of God who bears away the sin of the world. And if they hadn't caught the tremendous significance of that message the first time he said it he repeated it again.

Behold the Lamb of God. And the imagery of the Lamb of course is bound up with the ritual observances of the Old Testament. Where a lamb would have symbolically transferred to it the transgressions of others.

And then be slain in their place showing sinners by that grim object lesson. That their sin deserved death. But the justice of God had to be met.

And yet the mercy of God was also revealed. Because he provided the Lamb that took our place. Behold the Lamb of God.

The Lamb that God provides. God spared not his own son but delivered him up from our offenses. This may not be a popular view of the cross.

But it is the biblical view. And it's one that is psychologically sound. For no less a person than the renowned Swiss Christian psychologist Paul Tournier has told us that as sinners we instinctively feel the need of sin being exposed and judged.

And it is only when that sin is transferred to a substitute that our sense of justice and our experience of pardoning grace come together. Charles Wesley felt the powerful impact of the imagery of the Lamb led to the slaughter. The Lamb of God that would bear away the sin of the world.

And in one of his magnificent hymns he puts it like this. Sinners behold the Lamb of God. On him your spirits stay.

He bears the universal load. He takes your sins away. His only righteousness I show.

His saving grace proclaim. 'Tis all my business here below to cry behold the Lamb. Happy if with my latest breath I might but gasp his name.

Preach him to all and cry in death. Behold, behold the Lamb. As a sheep dumb before its shearers.

As a lamb led to the slaughter and sacrificed for our sins. And the wonder of it all is that he did this silently. Jesus had something to say and deserved to be heard.

He went throughout the synagogues of Galilee and he taught them as one having authority. He takes thousands of people to a green Galilean hillside and delivers for them the Sermon on the Mount. He confronts the power structure of his day and he condemns the hypocrisy of these men who on the outside are whitewashed but within are filled with the decadence of men's bones.

He lifts up his voice and makes it heard and no unmistakable terms does he speak correcting the pride of his disciples. And even when he is crucified he will have something to say in praying for those who are killing him. He will have something to say to a dying thief who wishes to be remembered by him.

He will have something to say to John the beloved disciple and to his mother making provision for her in his dying moments. But when it comes to defending himself this sheep before its shearers is dumb. This lamb led to the slaughter is silent.

Think of the passages of scripture in which the silence of the suffering servant of the Lord is underlined by the writers of the gospel story. Refer to just several of these passages and one of these is found in Matthew chapter 26. The 26th chapter of the gospel of Matthew beginning at verse 59.

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they didn't find any though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward and declared this fellow said I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.

Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus are you not going to answer what is this testimony that these men are bringing against you? But Jesus remained silent. Silent. And again in the 27th chapter of the gospel according to Matthew beginning at the 11th verse.

Jesus stood before the governor and Pontius Pilate asked him are you the king of the Jews? Yes it is as you say Jesus replied. When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders he gave no answer. Then Pilate asked him don't you hear how many things they are accusing you of? But Jesus made no reply not even to a single charge to the great amazement.

Of the governor. And again in the gospel according to Saint Luke in the 23rd chapter beginning at verse six. Pilate asked if Jesus were a Galilean.

When he heard that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction he sent him off to Herod who also happened to be in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus he was greatly pleased because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him he hoped to see him perform some miracle.

He plied him with many questions but Jesus gave him no answer. Jesus before the power structure of his day in the realm of religion and of politics keeps silence. Jesus in the presence of a sensual superstitious immoral king like Herod keeps silence.

Like a sheep before its shearers like a lamb led to the slaughter he is silent he is submissive. He is willing to be sacrificed for the sins of his people. The apostle Peter could never forget the bearing of Jesus in his dying agony.

His silence before his tormentors. And when he wrote to slaves who were suffering unjustly. He said Christ Jesus has left us an example that we should follow in his steps.

Being reviled he reviled not again. Being insulted he did not return insult in kind. The powerful authority of one who is innocent and suffers in silence.

A French poet in the 18th century was also fascinated by the silence of Jesus. And he drew from it this powerful lesson. He said with taunts and scoffs they mock what seems thy weakness.

With blows and outrage adding pain to pain. Thou art unmoved and steadfast in thy meekness. When I am wronged how quickly I complain.

Oppressed and afflicted. Lamb and sheep. One thing more death and burial.

Isaiah tells us of the death and burial of the Messiah. And in speaking of these events he refers to the violent death that the Messiah died. He speaks of him as by oppression and judgment being taken away.

He speaks of his descendants or as another translation puts it of his generation his contemporaries. He speaks of him as being cut off from the land of the living. He speaks of him as being stricken for the transgression of my people or as another translation puts it by the transgression of my people.

And how that he was assigned a grave with the wicked but was with the rich in his death. To prison as a common criminal. Experiencing judgment by those who perverted judgment and allowed perjured witnesses to have their say.

Who can declare his generation? What can we say about his contemporaries? They were an uncaring lot. They would rather have a cutthroat thief like Barabbas than Jesus. What they wanted concerning Jesus was death on demand.

And how their cry is echoed against the innocent today. Prison, perverted judgment, a degenerate generation. And not only for the transgressions of the people but by the transgressions of the people was he executed.

His violent death. But his violent death is followed by an honorable burial. The Roman custom would have been to leave the crucified there to decay in the oriental sun or to be devoured by beasts of prey.

The Jewish custom would have been to bury them and bury them immediately upon their execution. And their intent was that together with the two thieves crucified on either side of him so he would be buried in ignominy and shame. But God wanted to make it plain that having descended to the very depths of the dark valley of humiliation it was now time to reverse that process and to begin the exaltation of his son.

Men murdered him and men had intended to bury him in a garbage heap with common criminals. But God laid it upon the heart of a secret disciple to come out of the shadows and openly confess his loyalty to Jesus. And high counselor though he was to risk his future by associating himself with an executed felon.

And he gave his own new rock hewn sepulcher for the burial of Jesus. A violent death at the hands of wicked men but an honorable burial with the rich. God the father is beginning to reverse the trend and move upward.

Obedient unto death the death of the cross wherefore God will highly exalt him. And begin right at the lowest point of his death with a burial among the rich frustrating the designs of the wicked. And so we see Jesus oppressed and afflicted.

A sheep that is shorn a lamb that is slain. One who dies is buried. But in that burial we see the promise and the prophecy of his exaltation to God's right hand.

Crowned with honor and glory made a prince and a savior. And we worship him. Let us pray.

Lord by faith help us to behold upon the throne of the universe. A lamb that once was slain and now reigns in everlasting glory. Grant O God that by the inward moving of your Holy Spirit.

We may come to a right estimate of Jesus. Appreciate his suffering. Trust in his sacrifice.

And rejoice in his glory. In our savior's dear name we pray. Amen.

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