

Good Friday Sermon: “When God is Silent”

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From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”). When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.” Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.” And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

— *Matthew 27:45-53 NIV*

In the book *When God Was Taken Captive: Finding Hope When Heaven Seems Silent*, James DeLoach talks about a painting he saw that spoke to him. It was a picture of an old, burned-out mountain shack. All that remained was the chimney ... the charred debris of what had been that family’s sole possession. In front of the destroyed home stood an old, grandfatherly looking man dressed only in his underclothes with a small boy clutching a pair of patched overalls. It was evident that the child was crying. Beneath the picture were the words the artist felt the old man was speaking to the boy: “Hush child, God ain’t dead!” DeLoach said that picture of that burned-out mountain shack, that old man, the weeping child, and those words “God ain’t dead” was a reminder that all is not lost as long as God is alive ...¹ That reminder is not just for him; it’s for you and me, especially when life looks like a heap of rubble and God seems silent. We can trust God’s plans even in silence.

The challenge is that we don’t like being alone. Some may say, “That’s not my problem. I like being alone.” And I hear you, but there’s a big difference between being “alone” and “left by yourself.” And when we face adversity, it feels like we’ve been left to struggle by ourselves. It’s not an issue of bearing an unwelcomed weight; it can feel like abandonment when it happens in silence. When it comes to God, silence does not equate to absence. Even when we can’t hear anything, God is always up to something. Our responsibility is to keep trusting even in silence.

Our text is the dramatic climax of our Christian faith. Jesus is hung on a wooden cross to die for the sins of lost humanity. And “From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land.” This is less than a week after the procession into Jerusalem when the people waved palm branches before Him, shouting “Hosanna!”

Blessed is he who comes in the name of The Lord!² Some of those same people were crying, “Crucify him, crucify him.” It goes to show you that life can get dark quickly.

The good news is that we serve a God who shows up in dark situations. I’m not glorifying it. I’m just saying that when you face it, remember that God does some of His best work in the dark. In Genesis chapter one, darkness covered the face of the deep, and that’s when God said, “Let there be light.”³ In Exodus Chapter 10, God caused a plague of darkness to cover Egypt for three days, but the Israelites had light in the places where they lived.⁴ In Acts chapter sixteen, Paul and Silas were in prison. They decided to hold a worship service at midnight, and God sent an earthquake to set them free. God does some of His best work in the dark.

In the dark, “... Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ (which means ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’).” This is the only time in scripture when Jesus does not refer to God as “father.” This seems to suggest that, for a moment, His human side felt abandoned. And the verb “forsaken” is not in the perfect tense, which implies that for the last three hours, He had endured the darkness in silence. Some of our greatest battles are not due to physical exhaustion but what happens in our heads due to the silence. We confront the lies because we haven’t heard from God.

There’s actually a term for this—it’s called being “ghosted.” It describes someone leaving a relationship abruptly and ending all contact with the other person. Todd Rose, in his book *Collective Illusions*, writes, “An entire area of our brain ... is constantly on the lookout for even the smallest hint of negative judgment.” Rose refers to studies that show a “wounded heart ... can hurt just as much as a broken leg.”⁵ This is not to diminish the pain of Christ on the cross, but it is to suggest that, when we struggle in silence, we want to know, if you love me so much, why won’t you talk to me? And while I don’t have that answer, I do know that God will quiet the noise in our lives while He works things out in our favor.

How do we handle the silence? We learn to *Deepen our Devotional Life*. One of the often-overlooked spiritual disciplines is solitude. It calls us to consciously pull away from everything else in our lives, including other people, to give our ... undivided attention to God.⁶ John the Revelator practiced it when he was banished to the Isle of Patmos and had no choice but to pray and spend time in God’s presence.

I know it’s hard to see past solitude as a punishment, but can I push your perspective? The Bible says, “And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.” Because there comes a time when we must give up some things to experience others. We want God to bless us first, and then we’ll let go. But it doesn’t work that way. If it happens our way, we’ll be tempted to take credit for what we didn’t do. But when you let go, you’ll discover that God can do what you can’t.

Giving up some things allows you to recenter on what’s important, to realize that there’s a bigger plan at work in your life. Contrary to popular opinion, God isn’t concerned with just trying to get you money, cars, and clothes. He wants to get you in His presence. That’s where everything else will be added unto you. It may not make

sense now, but the older you get, the more you'll understand that there are some things that money can't buy.

So, what's in His presence? In His presence is a peace that surpasses all understanding. In His presence is a joy that the world didn't give and the world can't take away. In His presence is the confidence that no weapon formed against you shall prosper. In His presence is the conviction that nothing shall separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Dealing with silence leads us to *Deepen our Devotional Life*. It also challenges us to *Find Hope in our Hardship*. It's easy for us to be consumed with how difficult our circumstances look on the surface. While God may not change our situation immediately, we can find hope in what we're going through. Everything God allows us to experience has a purpose. And no silence can distance us from Him. In fact, He'll tear some things up to get us closer to Him.

It's why we all need divine intervention in our lives. And God will do some things a certain way to ensure you know it was Him. The Bible says "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." The curtain was four inches thick. It was sixty feet high and thirty feet wide. This was not something that could be cut with a pair of scissors. And He tore it from top to bottom, not bottom to top. God wants to ensure that nobody misses the fact that it took divine intervention to bring you through. Not only that, but He goes to great lengths to bring you closer. The veil was between the holy place and the holy of holies, which the high priest went behind only once a year to make atonement for the people. Now that the veil was torn, you don't need to wait on the high priest. You can go for yourself because God will tear some things up to give us access.

There is no limit to the lengths God will go to bring you out. The text says, "The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life." We want to come out but don't like the tearing and breaking part. We want our breakthroughs in neat packages. But some things had to be torn and broken to raise you. The reality is that God will perform a miracle to bring us through. And will do it in such a way that everyone who witnessed will know that had it not been for God on your side, there's no way you would have come through that. This is why when you don't hear the answer you want, you must go back to your faith files and remember how God brought you out the last time. He breaks things up to bring us out of dead situations. You don't have to stress out because you didn't get the answer you wanted. Just trust that God is working behind the scenes to bring you out.

In 2006, a storm hit Houston, causing a lot of damage. Trees and power lines were down all over the city. I stayed up late that night to watch the news to determine if we could have church the next day. I was watching KHOU News, and Lisa Faronda interviewed Amy Stout from CenterPoint Energy. Lisa said, "Amy, many of our viewers are suffering from power outages. Can you tell me when they can expect their power to be restored?" I'll never forget Amy's answer. She said, "Lisa,

we'll be working all night to regain power. So, tell your audience to go to sleep, and when they wake up, their power will be restored." That's the hope you need to hold on to today: amid your brokenness and silence, go to sleep and rest, knowing that God is already at work to restore what's been lost in your life. To raise what's been destroyed. All you have to do is be still and know that God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in times of trouble!⁷

Dealing with silence leads us to *Deepen our Devotional Life* and challenges us to *Find Hope in our Hardship*. Lastly, it causes us to *Commit to Being a Radical Witness*. The growth of the church hinges on the witness of believers. But not a mild-mannered, inauthentic, and robotic response. We must be bold and often unconventional when sharing the good news. "They came out of the tombs after Jesus's resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people." Because if God goes to great lengths to bring us out, then we should go to great lengths to be witnesses to the world.

Not everyone can look at you and tell what you've been through. They have no idea the struggles you've had to deal with or the difficulties you've had to overcome. They may see you in church praising God, but they don't know what it took for you to get where you are. That's because God has restored you in grace, so you don't look like what you've been through.

If they knew what you had to endure, they would understand why you shout the way you do. If they knew all the traps the enemy set for you that you had to navigate, they would understand why you have difficulty sitting down during praise and worship. If they knew how many times you almost gave up, but God held on to you, maybe they would understand why your praise is so passionate. Being a witness isn't just about what you say. Some people do know what you've been through. So, showing up is a testimony of God's sustaining power in your life. Your presence is evidence that you can live through your challenges even when it seems like God is silent.

Notes

1. James DeLoach, Associate Pastor of the Second Baptist Church of Houston, quoted in *When God Was Taken Captive*, Willard Aldrich (Multnomah, 1989), 24.
2. John 12:13 NIV.
3. Genesis 1:1-3a NIV.
4. Exodus 10:21-23 NIV.
5. Todd Rose, *Collective Illusions*, (Hachette Book Group, 2022), 35-36.
6. <https://www.thenivbible.com/blog/how-to-practice-solitude/>
7. Psalm 46 NIV.