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The Silence Of God

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"How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"

"And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled (Rev. 6:10,11).

"Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence; a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about Him" (Ps. 50:3).

The first of the foregoing passages gives us the cry of martyred souls John saw under the altar in the heavenly temple. Their appeal is for justice against their murderers. Here is proof that the soul does not lie in unconscious sleep during the intermediate state. These souls are conscious. They cry for judgment to fall upon the earth.

In response to their cry, they are given white robes, indicating that they are justified in their desire for vengeance on the wicked. While on earth the saint is to pray for his enemies, but after death he may pray against them. These martyred souls are told that they must rest until the martyrdom of all the others, who are to be killed, shall have been accomplished. All this indicates that this dispensation of mercy is to end in bitter persecution of the people of God. It would seem that there are days of martyrdom ahead for the saints as well as be-

hind. And nobody knows when he may be called upon to seal his faith with his blood. Who knows but that in the near future some governmental decree might put us to the test as to whether we will obey God or man?

The second text is a sequel to the first. It points to the time when the cry of the martyr is heard and vengeance is executed. "Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence; a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about Him." It looks to the time when the longsuffering of God is at an end, and Christ comes in judgment, even in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the gospel (II Thess. 1:8).

THE PROBLEM OF A SILENT GOD

By the silence of God we mean that God is not openly and publicly manifesting Himself as in other days. By the silence of God we mean that God is not performing public miracles as of old. Webster defines a miracle as "an event which cannot be accounted for as produced by any of the known forces of nature and which is, therefore, attributed to a supernatural force." And by a "public miracle" we mean an event that demonstrates beyond dispute the existence of a personal God. Sir Robert Anderson has said that "Since apostolic times, the finger of God has never been openly at work upon the earth—never once has a public miracle been witnessed, nor a single public event to compel

the belief that there is a God at all.’’

A silent heaven is the greatest mystery of our existence. A silent heaven is the greatest trial of the faith of the saint. The atheist does not believe in the possibility of miracles because he does not believe in the existence of a personal and powerful God. The believer's problem is the absence of miracles. As a believer in a personal and powerful and loving Heavenly Father, he cannot understand why miracles are not common today.

If there is a God, why does He allow things to be as they are? Why does He not step in and put down all the wrong and rebellion that covers the face of the earth? Why does He suffer the wicked to oppress the righteous? "If there is an almighty God, why doesn't He do something?" is the despairing cry of many a mother whose son wades the mud and fights on foreign soil. How is the existence of a good and powerful God consistent with such a long period of silence in the face of the defiance of His enemies and the cries of His people? If there is a personal and all-powerful God, why do the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper? In the face of these questions, the infidel plies his trade and the believer is filled with anxiety and perplexity.

In the days of Moses, God was so manifestly at work in performing miracles that even the wicked magicians of Egypt had to confess, "This is the finger of God" (Ex. 8:19). And in the days of our Lord's earthly ministry, miracles were common and were not even disputed by His enemies. Christ's miracles made Him famous, but they won no genuine converts. In John 2:23 we read of Him that "When He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in His name, when they saw the miracles which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because He knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man; for He knew what was in man." Those who believed because of what they saw could not be trusted.

Miracles continued through the days of the apostles, but became less common towards the close of the apostolic age. The gift of miracles was sovereignly bestowed upon and distributed among the members of the early churches.

NO PUBLIC MIRACLES TODAY

It is obvious that we do not have public miracles today at least in such unmistakable manner as in ancient times. I know there are people today who claim to be able to perform miracles of healing and talking (their claims are usually limited to these two things), but there is something so manifestly lacking in their so-called miracles, that their claims are not above suspicion. And when they are investigated, there is room for question which was not the case in the days of Christ and the apostles.

There is a problem in the silence of God. When Peter was in jail waiting to be executed,

God sent an angel to deliver him. And Paul was miraculously delivered at Philippi. But since those days, millions of saints have been martyred, and their cries for deliverance have not been answered. The heavens above them have been as brass.

In the long ago, Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey Him?" God accepted the proud monarch's challenge and demonstrated His power over him in terrible judgments; but in these days, men challenge and even ridicule the very idea of a personal God; and heaven says not a word. The atheists have just about used up all the bad words in decrying religion, denying God, and heaping abuse upon the Bible; and to all their bombast God is silent.

THE EXPLANATION OF A SILENT GOD

God's silence in the face of defiant foes, challenging Him to combat, can be explained. God's silence to the cries of His helpless children does have an explanation. What is it?

1. It is not because God is helpless. He is never helpless in the face of opposition. There are no crises with Him. "What His soul desireth even that He doeth" (Job 23:13). He is able to deliver His children from every danger.

2. It is not because He does not care. The Heavenly Father is the wisest and best of all fathers. He never makes any mistakes in the care of His children. We are commanded to cast all our care upon Him on the ground that He careth for us. When we cry to Him in our troubles, and He does not give us what we ask for, we must not think that He does not care. It is because He does care for us that He does not always give us what we ask for. He is wiser than we are in asking. It is our love and interest in our own children that keeps us from giving them all they want. When we are sick and beg God to heal us and He does not do it, we may be sure that it is better for us to be sick. God teaches us some things on the sick bed that we cannot learn while well. Some lessons are better learned on the back than on the feet. The Bible is a sweeter Book in the sick room than in the workshop. If we pray to be delivered from our enemies and He does not deliver us, it is in order that we may hear Him say, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The greatest homage which wickedness can pay to righteousness is to persecute it. It is a gift from God to be allowed to suffer for His Name. Spurgeon writes: "Not because of any personal fault, but simply on account of their godly character, the Lord's Daniels are hated; but they are blessed by that which looks like a curse."

3. It is not because God does not know. The omniscience of God is one of the sweetest attributes to the believer. One of the sweetest psalms of David is the 139th in which he celebrates the

omniscience of God: "O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me, Thou knowest my down sitting and mine uprising, Thou understandest my thoughts afar off. Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways." Here is a good way to test my spirituality. Am I glad that God knows all about me? It does make me happy to know that He knows how I hate sin and struggle against it. He knows that His people are hungry and thirsting after righteousness, and has promised to fill them with righteousness. Yes, He will fill us with goodness, for He Himself created this hunger within us. Some sweet day every saint will be as good as he wants to be.

4. God's silence does not mean that He has vacated His throne. God is still on His throne. He is still reigning and working all things after the counsel of His own will. But He is not ruling openly and publicly. He is staging the drama of human history from behind the scenes. His reign is secret rather than public. He rules through Providence, and Providence is always mysterious. His judgments are unsearchable and His ways are past finding out (Rom. 11:33). The finger of God is at work today, but the world does not see it. He is performing miracles today, but not of a public character.

5. God's silence is not due to the lack of faith on the part of His people. This is not the reason for the absence of public miracles today. We are often told that if God's people had the faith of Peter and Paul and other early saints, that miracles would be as common now as then. We do not believe it. We are not arguing that any of us has the faith he ought to have, but this is not the reason for lack of miracles. Miracles were limited to the time of witnessing to Israel as a nation, and when the nation was turned from and the Gentiles were turned to, miracles ceased. Miracles were for the purpose of accrediting Christ to the Jews as their Messiah. Miracles were Christ's credentials to His people Israel. We give one incident to illustrate: One day a leper came to Christ and worshipped Him, saying, "Lord, if Thou wilt Thou canst make me clean." The Lord healed him with a touch, and then warned him to tell no man, but to go and shew himself to his priest and get a certificate of health (Mark 1:44). In this way he would be witnessing to the nation, through its priesthood, that there was one among them who could cure leprosy, and therefore, must be their Messiah. In spite of all the miracles, attesting the presence of their Messiah, the nation rejected Christ in His personal ministry and in the ministry of His apostles: and then public miracles ceased.

There is a clamour today in religion for the miraculous and sensational and spectacular. And this is because people tire of the Word of God. People who are looking for miracles as a sign or proof of God's presence and favor are putting themselves in a good position to be deceived. What is supernatural is not necessarily Divine.

The Bible reveals that there will be miracles of a public nature during the last days of this dispensation, but they will be of the devil and not of God. Our Lord, in speaking of the signs of His coming, said that false Christs and false prophets would arise and show great signs and wonders: insomuch, that if it were possible, they would deceive the very elect (Matt. 24:24). The word for "sign" in the passage is the same word usually translated "miracle". In Rev. 13, we read that the false prophet shall do great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles. In II Thess. 2:9, we learn that the coming of the "man of sin" will be after the working of Satan with all power and signs (miracles) and lying wonders. If there is anybody performing miracles today, the gift is not from God but from Satan, and is a sign of the end-time.

This is the day of salvation and not the day of judgment. This is the day of the longsuffering of God. When He next breaks the silence it will be to speak in wrath and let loose the judgments that shall engulf the world. "Our God shall come and shall not keep silence."

A SILENT HEAVEN!

Yes, but it is not the silence of a helpless and defeated God. A silent heaven! Yes, but it is not the silence of a callous and indifferent Father. A silent heaven! Yes, but it is not the silence of a Father who forgets His children. It is the silence which is the pledge and proof that the way is still open for the guiltiest sinner to draw near to God in Christ. It is the assurance that we are still living in the day of salvation. When the believer faints, and the infidel revolts, and men beg God to break His silence and show His hand on the earth, they little realize what that will mean. It will mean the withdrawal of amnesty; it will mean the end of the reign of grace; it will mean the closing of the day of mercy; it will mean the shutting of the door to the Ark of salvation; it will mean the dawning of the day of wrath—the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

"Knowing the terror of the Lord," like Paul, we would persuade men. "Because there is wrath," we would warn men to flee the wrath to come. Knowing that there is none other name given among men whereby we must be saved, we urge men to trust the Lord Jesus Christ.

God has spoken to us in His Son. We have the message about His Son in the Bible. It tells us that eternal life is in Jesus Christ. It tells us that the Son was punished that sinners might not perish. Despise this message and reject the Son, and when God speaks again, you will hear Him speak in tones of judgment.

