

"THE SILENT LAMB"

I. Introduction

- A. In our age of constant distraction, silence is not something with which most people are comfortable.
1. Our impulse is to fill the silence by looking at our smartphones or turning on our televisions.
 2. One reason why silence is especially unnerving to modern people is because it confronts us with the fact that there is a reality that is external to us, a reality that is beyond our ability to control.
 3. There is a connection between this and the fact that, in the Bible, silence is the posture of those who are exposed to divine judgment. (see Isa. 41:1; Hab. 2:20; Rev. 8:1)
 4. When a sinner stands before the throne of Lord to be judged, there is nothing he can say.
 5. He has absolutely no control over the situation.
- B. When Jesus was put on trial, he was standing before human judges.
1. He was also completely innocent of the charges that had been brought against him.
 2. That being the case, we might expect that Jesus would have seized the opportunity to defend himself when he was questioned by the judges before whom he was tried.
 3. Instead, he made no attempt to speak in his own defense, remaining mostly silent.

4. He did this when he was before the Sanhedrin and when he was before Pilate.
 5. Of course, people on trial do sometimes opt against testifying in their own defense.
 6. But when that happens, it is because the person is concerned about the possibility of incriminating himself.
 7. This was obviously not the reason for Jesus's silence.
 8. It would have been impossible for him to incriminate himself, because he had done nothing wrong.
- C. Jesus was put on trial before two courts, one Jewish and one Roman.
1. His trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin established his guilt in Jewish eyes, calling for his execution.
 2. But it was the Roman prefect who had the authority to implement the death penalty.
 3. That being the case, Jesus was brought before Pontius Pilate under the charge that he claimed to be the "King of the Jews," something that a Roman governor could not ignore.
- D. As we have just noted, Jesus did not defend himself in either his Jewish trial or in his Roman trial.
1. The silence of Jesus before his earthy judges speaks volumes to us.
 2. It helps us better understand the meaning of our Savior's death.
 3. In tonight's sermon, we will see that Jesus's silence was a righteous silence, a sovereign silence, and a necessary silence.

II. A Righteous Silence

- A. The first thing we will note about Jesus's silence is that it was a righteous silence.
1. This is evident when we consider Jesus's trial before the Sanhedrin, which Matthew describes at the end of chapter 26 of his Gospel.
 2. Given that the nation of Israel was the church at that point in redemptive history, the Sanhedrin was the highest ecclesiastical judicial body.
 3. Yet this trial was a mockery of justice.
 4. It is clear from the Gospel accounts that the Jewish leaders had no intention of giving Jesus a fair trial.
 5. They had already decided upon their verdict.
 6. Jesus was presumed guilty from the start.
 7. The proceedings were a facade.
 8. They were like the show trials that frequently took place in the Soviet Union, and that have sadly been conducted in our own nation in recent years.
 9. The purpose of Jesus's trial before the Sanhedrin was not to render a just judgment, but to come up with some pretense for condemning Jesus.
- B. The Council's problem, of course, was that Jesus had not done anything wrong.
1. This is why the Jewish leaders had to bring in false witnesses to bring accusations against Jesus.
 2. When the high priest asked what Jesus had to say in response to this false testimony, our Lord remained silent, even though he

easily could have refuted his accusers.

3. The reason why Jesus held his tongue was because he was being obedient to the will of his Father.
 4. Instead of defending himself against the false charges, he submitted himself to death on a cross.
 5. In doing this, he showed himself to be doubly righteous.
 6. Not only was he was innocent of any wrongdoing, but he was also perfectly obedient to his Father.
- C. Jesus's righteousness is also attested to by the very man who condemned him to death, Pontius Pilate.
1. When Jesus was brought before him and examined, Pilate repeatedly said, "I find no guilt in this man."
 2. Jesus was accused of being an enemy of the state.
 3. But Pilate quickly saw that Jesus was not guilty of this charge.
 4. Pilate's declarations about Jesus's innocence attest that Jesus was unjustly put to death.
 5. As civil magistrate, Pilate had the authority to have Jesus executed.
 6. But in taking that action, he went against the verdict that he himself had rendered about Jesus.
 7. Our Lord was condemned to death by the very official who had declared that he had done nothing wrong.
- D. The righteousness of Jesus's silence is also evident when we consider the sense in which it would have been a sin for him to defend himself against the charges brought against him.

1. He could have made a compelling case for the dismissal of these charges.
2. While that may have the appearance of justice from our perspective, it would not have been just for Jesus to do this.
3. As the supreme Prophet of God, every word that he spoke had to be in harmony with the purpose for which he was sent into the world.
4. To exonerate himself before his judges would have amounted to refusing to be made into an object of judgment in our place.
5. Moreover, the argument that Jesus could have used to persuade Pilate to acquit him would have been misleading.
6. Pilate might have dismissed the charges if Jesus had contended that his kingship was no threat to Caesar.
7. But that would not have been true.
8. As the Dutch pastor Klaas Schilder points out, "Christ most certainly represents a 'threat' to the Roman empire... True, Christ's kingdom enters the world having no physical form and He Himself enters Jerusalem as a 'poor and defenseless' king, but in His work and being lies a power which will cause Rome to crumble... Even though Christ does not oppose an external, physical force to the kingdoms of the world, and even though He does not beat down the gate of a single world city, He does do something, for He works from within outward... He weaves the pattern of a heavenly kingdom in human hearts." [Schilder, *Christ on Trial*, 358-359]

III. A Sovereign Silence

- A. We turn now to a second thing to note about Jesus's silence before his human judges, which is that it was a sovereign silence.

1. As we consider what transpires during Jesus's appearance before Pilate, we see that his silence was the means by which he exercised sovereign control over the situation.
 2. Pilate was too smart to think that the Jews would be upset by someone who was anti-Rome.
 3. That being the case, Pilate wanted to know what Jesus had done to upset the Jewish leaders.
 4. Jesus could have seized this opportunity to plead his innocence.
 5. If he had done so, he may very well have been acquitted.
 6. Instead, the few things he did say were not spoken in his defense.
 7. And in the end he stopped giving any answers at all.
 8. In the brief interactions he has with Pilate, Jesus comes across as the one who is conducting the interview.
 9. This calls our attention to the fact that Jesus is not being forced to do anything against his will.
 10. Unlike silent sinners before the bar of divine judgment, Jesus was in complete control of everything that transpired when he was put on trial.
 11. His silence before Pharaoh only underscored that he was laying down his life entirely of his own accord.
- B. Jesus spoke of this in his Good Shepherd discourse in John 10.
1. He told his Jewish listeners, "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep... For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. *No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own*

accord." (Jn. 10:14, 17-18a)

2. By laying down his life, Jesus secured eternal life for his sheep.
3. And he made it clear that he was not a helpless victim in his death.
4. His life was not taken from him.
5. He willingly laid it down, in obedience to the will of his Father.
6. His silence bore witness that he was sovereign over everything that was transpiring around him.
7. And take note of the irony here.
8. Jesus's divine sovereignty was most gloriously manifested at the very moment when he appeared to be utterly powerless.

IV. A Necessary Silence

- A. One more thing to note about Jesus's silence when he was being tried before his human judges is that it was a necessary silence.
 1. This too was evident when he was being questioned by Pilate.
 2. As we have said, Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent.
 3. Pilate wanted to release him.
 4. He was eager to hear Jesus say something in his defense.
 5. The reason why he was so amazed at Jesus's silence was because he knew that Jesus could have prevailed over his accusers.
 6. This is precisely why Jesus's silence was necessary.
 7. It ensured that he would be put to death.

- B. Jesus remained mute before Pilate because he knew that he had to be condemned as the spotless Lamb of God.
1. This was the only way he could take away his people's sins.
 2. But in order for this to happen, Jesus needed others to do what he himself could not do, and this is where his silence was so vital.
 3. As we said earlier, Jesus was indeed sovereign over what transpired at his trials.
 4. But he exercised his sovereignty through the personal moral agency of others.
 5. This was the only way he could be condemned to death.
 6. Think about it.
 7. Jesus was the only perfectly righteous man who ever lived.
 8. He was God in human flesh.
 9. His condemnation was the greatest act of evil that has ever been perpetrated.
 10. Obviously, Jesus could not be the one who perpetrated such a grave injustice.
 11. He is God, and God cannot do anything that is evil.
 12. This is why Jesus's silence was necessary.
 13. It was the only way to ensure that he would be subjected to the unjust judgment that he could not render on his own.

V. Conclusion

- A. Jesus's silence before his accusers opens up our lips.
- B. As John Calvin points out, Jesus's silence is what makes it possible for us to call upon God as our Father in heaven.
- C. Calvin writes, "It is because our Lord Jesus was silent, refusing to defend his righteous cause, that our mouths are now opened and we are able to call upon God, as if we ourselves were righteous. More than that, [Jesus] is our Advocate who speaks on our behalf. So if our Lord Jesus remained mute, it was so that he might now intercede for us with God his Father; and although we are no more than poor and utterly wretched vermin, we nevertheless have access to God: we can appeal personally to him and with full voice can claim him as our Father." [*Crucified and Risen*, 51]
- D. We see one other way Jesus's silence opens our lips when we consider the vision described in Revelation 5.
- E. In that vision, only the silent Lamb is found worthy to open the sealed scroll.
- F. And because he has opened it, we now join the angel choirs and open our mouths to declare,

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (Rev. 5:12)