

What We Can Learn From God's Silence

I recently uncovered the amazing mysteries of tranquility while excavating a lost sermon of Jesus. I'd been overlooking it in my gospel quarry for years. Once I knew where to dig, it became a simple discovery—one I invite you to make for yourself.

Take a few moments with your New Testament and look up every passage detailing the crucifixion. Once you've found them all, write out the statements recorded as coming from the lips of Jesus while He hung on the cross. Now, slowly repeat those statements aloud, one after the other. You'll find they barely fill one minute of spoken conversation when strung together. Seven one-liners!

What was Jesus saying during the rest of His six hours on the cross?

There is much He *could* have said. He could have ended the opening argument of His extradition with an ear-splitting sermon or offered up a plateful of prophetic thunder as a parting shot for Pilate. He could have unloaded an earful at the elders. He could have undressed with righteous rhetoric the Roman cohorts who stripped His clothes, and then showered condemnation on those who spat upon Him. He could have bellowed out a few shots from Jeremiah's prophecies to wayward Israel or ordered up a few hungry bears as Elijah did.

Yet the Bible says, "when He was reviled, [He] did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten" (1 Pet. 2:23). In the natural, Jesus' actions made no sense. When taunted, He remained tight-lipped. When abused and pierced, His words of forgiveness flowed as quickly as His blood.

He didn't require His wounds to dry, scab and scar before He

forgave. There is no record that Jesus calculated His personal pain before discharging his pardon. Each bruise and blow was met with silent mercy.

In His silence, Jesus was doing more than dying. He was communicating in red ink the timeless secrets of the kingdom. He was openly showing His bride how to embrace the cross that awaited her—and no true disciple can escape the cross.

We all know that it is tough at times to maintain a pure perspective through strenuous seasons of cross shaping. My only hope of success comes when my eyes remain fixed on the body language of Calvary's quiet Lamb, when I carefully listen to the words He *didn't* say. For when my eyes and ears tune out the cross, I fast become exasperated with people and plummet into spiritual defeat.

There will always be people who make big things out of small things in my life. But then, I remember the cross—and how Jesus went through it first.

I can always count on uninvited guests who enjoy watching my heavenly Father discipline me—and that can be terribly embarrassing. But again, I remember: Jesus went through that, too.

Even if God sends spiritually immature Christians into my life as part of His mysterious blueprint to grow me—to school me in silence—I must not forget that Jesus felt that too. All of this was the cross! At least it's the one Jesus knew.

But for all the strains you and I face as followers, no one will ever pay a toll like Jesus. His death is filled with endless grace and boundless perplexity.

For it was I, not Jesus, who should have died for violating my Creator's commands. And it was I who deserved the burden of transporting heavy timbers barefoot over jagged hillsides for my iniquity. It was I who merited loud public laughter and the

agony of pointy thorns stabbing through my forehead.

And it was I who should have felt my ribs being pierced as pagan spittle dripped from my face. Yes, it was I who should have hung incapacitated for six millennia, not six hours.

Yet it was Jesus, not I, who violently died in silent payment.

So this Easter, I encourage you to rise early, don the bonnets and polish the shoes. It's the day when God's people around the world colorfully rejoice in His resurrection!

But while you're celebrating, pause to remember the greatest silent sermon ever preached. The one that lasted for six hours. The one that's easy to memorize but difficult to emulate. The one that was lived, not spoken, by a silent Lamb.

Adapted from "The Silence of the Lamb" by Scott Hagan, published in *Charisma* magazine.

PRAYER POWER FOR THE WEEK OF 03/25/13

This week as you focus on God's wonderful gift of reconciliation through Christ, pray that many will find repentance and receive eternal life through Him. Remember Israel and ask for the protection of its citizens and seasonal travelers this week. Pray regarding the peace process and President Obama's visit there. Continue to pray for revival in our churches, especially during this Easter season. Pray that Christians would unite in prayer and purpose for God's kingdom to expand. Remember the persecuted church and ask God to send laborers into the harvest field. John 3:14-17, 1 Thes. 5:15-19, James 5:16-17