

Silent Before the Shearers

Good Friday

Pastor Josh Frazee

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

“(L)ike a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.” (Pause for several seconds.) Silence, complete and utter silence, allows for a few things. It allows us to hear things we might not otherwise hear, like an air conditioning unit we might be tuning out without consciously realizing it. It also allows us to get uncomfortable. It is often when we are silent that our consciences get the chance to call to mind sins which we have committed, or things we should have done, and left omitted.

In our Old Testament text from Isaiah, God tells us through the prophet Isaiah that His “servant shall act wisely.” Silence can be a mark of wisdom, not only for Jesus as God’s servant, but also for us. If you consider your relationships with other people, how many of them work, or would work, if you were never silent? Part of communication is speaking, to be sure, but the other part of it is listening, which requires silence. Have you been perfect in listening to the thoughts and desires your neighbors have expressed to you? While you and I have not been perfect at this, Jesus, God’s servant, has.

Yet despite His perfection in listening, Jesus was “so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind.” In His trials before Pilate, Pilate handed Him over to be flogged and beaten, even before He would be required to carry His cross and be nailed to it at Calvary. Not only that, the guards and soldiers mocked Him, spit on Him, and struck Him.

These are the things which have been passed down to us over the years that we might believe, unlike the “kings (who) shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which (will not have been) told them they (shall) see, and that which they (will) not (have) heard they (will) understand. Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” Who, if not to you and to me, dear brothers and sisters in Christ?

Jesus grew up like any of us, growing from youth to His adulthood, yet “he had no form or majesty that we should look at him” any differently than our neighbors. He had His growing pains, and especially the sorrows He faced from Maundy Thursday to Good Friday so many years ago: the sorrows of His disciples abandoning Him, Peter denying Him, the people He had taught bearing false witness against Him; and even Pilate giving Him over to die despite finding no guilt in Him.

Some of you can relate to some of these things, including having bad things happen to you for a fault or faults that were not your own. But for those times you did deserve punishment, Jesus bore what you really deserved: an eternal death of suffering. Though there are honestly times when bad things happen to us for faults that are not our own, far more often we can relate to that criminal next to Jesus: “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong (Luke 23:40a-41).”

Jesus had no reason to be silent before Pilate or Herod, yet He did not speak up in His own defense. “He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” Although His sentence was unjust, the people at the time went along with His death, either out of fear or out of disappointment or any other reason. “(W)e esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted...(So) he was wounded for transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace.”

But we can’t point the finger at those of that time and say that that was them; God tells us today through Isaiah that “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way.” That statement of judgment ought to cause us all to stop our mouths and be silent. God tells us all that *your sin, your going your own way* put Jesus, the righteous, perfect Son of God to death. And while our old sinful natures want to scream out in protest, Jesus remained silent despite receiving your punishment in your place.

“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.”

“By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgressions of my people?” Jesus’ own generation did not consider these things, and without receiving God’s Word, we would not have considered them either. You are God’s people now, but only by the bleeding and death of Jesus in your place.

“(I)t was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief...by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my (that is, God’s) servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.”

Because Jesus remained silent before Pilate and Herod and received the sentence of condemnation in your place, God has received His sacrifice in your place, and has chosen to divide the portion that Jesus earned with the many, that is, all who would come to faith in Him, His teachings, His life, His death, and His resurrection. “(B)ecause he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors...he...makes intercession for the transgressors.” Jesus, the perfect Son of God who suffered and died in your place on this night so many years ago, He is interceding for you at the throne of God for your salvation. And God listens with perfect silence to His Son’s pleas for our salvation, not because you or I deserve it, but because Jesus has earned it for us. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.