

**THE SILENCE OF GOD**  
**Job 30:20**  
**Psalm 10:1, 13:1, 22:2, 44:23**

**INTRODUCTION:**

If you attend here on a regular basis, you will know that, typically, I base a sermon on a single passage of Scripture. I usually refer to several other texts as support for the message but, normally, the sermon springs from one portion of the Bible.

Today is not typical. Today, I want to read a number of texts. Will you please sit back and listen?

**JOB 30:15-20**

<sup>15</sup> *Terrors overwhelm me;  
my dignity is driven away as by the wind,  
my safety vanishes like a cloud.*  
<sup>16</sup> *“And now my life ebbs away;  
days of suffering grip me.*  
<sup>17</sup> *Night pierces my bones;  
my gnawing pains never rest.*  
<sup>18</sup> *In his great power God becomes like clothing to me;  
he binds me like the neck of my garment.*  
<sup>19</sup> *He throws me into the mud,  
and I am reduced to dust and ashes.*  
<sup>20</sup> *“I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer;  
I stand up, but you merely look at me.*

**PSALM 10:1**

<sup>1</sup> *Why, O LORD, do you stand far off?  
Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?*

**PSALM 13:1-4**

<sup>1</sup> *How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?*  
<sup>2</sup> *How long must I wrestle with my thoughts  
and every day have sorrow in my heart?  
How long will my enemy triumph over me?*  
<sup>3</sup> *Look on me and answer, O LORD my God.  
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death;*  
<sup>4</sup> *my enemy will say, “I have overcome him,”  
and my foes will rejoice when I fall.*

**PSALM 22:1-2**

<sup>1</sup> *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?  
Why are you so far from saving me,  
so far from the words of my groaning?*  
<sup>2</sup> *O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,  
by night, and am not silent.*

**PSALM 44:23-26**

<sup>23</sup> *Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep?  
Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever.*  
<sup>24</sup> *Why do you hide your face  
and forget our misery and oppression?*  
<sup>25</sup> *We are brought down to the dust;  
our bodies cling to the ground.*  
<sup>26</sup> *Rise up and help us;  
redeem us because of your unfailing love.*

Do any of those texts speak to you? Do any of them speak of you? Have you ever felt as if you were trying to maintain a relationship with a God Who won't talk to you...Who won't answer you...Who won't rescue you...Who might not even be listening to you? Do you feel like that this morning?

It is not easy to worship a silent God. It is not easy to love a silent God. It is not even easy to tolerate a silent God. And if you have ever felt that way, know this: you are in esteemed company. The heroes of Scripture had their difficulties dealing with a silent God. So it doesn't mean that you are defective or that your faith is flawed. In fact, quite to the contrary, it may indicate that you are taking your faith quite seriously.

Oswald Chambers has written, "Has God trusted you with His silence, a silence that has great meaning? God's silences are actually His answers. His silence is the sign that He is bringing you into an even more wonderful understanding of Himself."

To paraphrase that, when you are down to nothing, God is up to something. And when you think God is silent, He may be speaking volumes.

Now, in one sense, God is never really silent--we just are deaf to what He has to say to us. Do you remember Job? He was afflicted in a multitude of ways but he was especially troubled by the silence of God. He said, "*I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer; I stand up, but you merely look at me.*" And you know that is the way it must have felt to Him. He questioned God's love for him and God's care of him. But by the end of the book of Job, we learn that God still loved Job and that He was still caring for him and blessing him.

Like Job, we sometimes judge God before the final sentence is completed. And like Job, we can mistake God's silence for indifference.

In God's hands, silence can be a powerful tool to shape the heart, mold the mind and change the life of one He loves. So, this morning, let's look at this powerful tool God often uses. Let's look at what God's silence can achieve.

**I. Silence Can Make Us Uncomfortable**

I began this message with a moment of silence. It really wasn't all that long: less than a minute. But didn't it make you feel uncomfortable? As I indicated a couple of weeks ago, silence is so foreign to the way we live our lives that we don't know how to react to it. We think something is wrong if there is silence.

Radio and television deplore silence. They refer to it as "dead air" and their fear is that if people are scanning up and down the dial, looking for something to listen to, they may scan right past them if all they hear is silence. So the broadcast media has "bump music" to lead into a segment program and to lead out of it. They employ dramatic music to plug the gaps and background music to fill the spaces. Broadcasters try never to have dead air.

Taking our cue from the broadcasters, in the church, we try not to have dead air. We don't even stop between the songs any more: we want the service to flow without a pause. I've requested that those who are to lead us in prayer or who are to preside over the Lord's Table are to be moving during the last verse of the preceding song so that we don't have a break while we wait for them to walk to the platform.

In all of our lives, we are so unaccustomed to silence that it can make us very uncomfortable. And I wonder if that is not why God uses it sometimes. Most often, we do not welcome change unless we are uncomfortable. God is in the business of changing hearts, changing minds and changing lives and, to get our cooperation, sometimes He uses silence so we will be uncomfortable and open to change.

**II. Silence Can Make Us Listen**

Silence also makes us listen. I asked Mrs. Raines' permission to tell this and she okayed it.

On Mondays, Sandy reads to the two kindergarten classes at the Clay City Elementary School. I hold the books. Lately, when we have arrived, Mrs. Reed has had most of the children in the school library checking in and checking out books. And Mrs. Raines has had the rest of the students in

her classroom where she reads to them. We meet the children in that room.

The first time we arrived there while Mrs. Raines was reading, I was blown away by her command of the class. She spoke very softly...with very expressive tones...and with numerous pauses...and the children hung on every word. Clearly, there was something arresting about her style. Silence...and softness...made the children listen very attentively.

I talked with Larry Brant about this and how much more effective it is than trying to out-shout the kids. Larry, being an old educator (uh, I mean, a FORMER educator), said, "I've found that when you play their game, you never win." Effective educators don't try to out shout the pupils. They get their attention with soft words and effective silence.

Don't you know that God is a great educator? He already knew that before Mr. Brant or Mrs. Raines. God knows that His silence can make us more attentive.

Sometimes, when we long for a word from the Lord and we just don't seem to hear it, God may be trying to get our attention so we will listen to Him when He does speak to us.

Speaking personally, it is often after those long periods of deafening silence that I seem to learn the most. I am more open and ready to study His Word and accept it as His truth. I am more willing to hear what He is saying to me through other Christians. I am more receptive to His voice in nature and in the events of daily living. I am more attentive to the still small voice of God as He speaks to my heart, confirming His Word, affirming His will and convincing me of His way.

But, typically, I have to be prepared to listen. And one of the most powerful ways God prepares me to listen to His voice is through the effective use of silence.

### **III. Silence Can Make Us Think**

Another result of effective silence is that it can make us think. I have a lot of faults and failings as a teacher but one of the most glaring is that I do not use silence very effectively. In a classroom situation, I will often ask questions designed to stimulate discussion and then, when I don't get a quick answer, I supply it myself. On those occasions when I have been willing to tolerate a period of silence, the class has often come up with some amazing insights and astute deductions. But if I jump in too soon with the answer, they clam-up.

I wonder why that is. Don't you think it is possible that they may simply have needed some time to think about the question and consider their response? Answers too quickly given, too soon supplied, stifle thinking and hinder learning.

God intends that we should worship Him with all of our heart, all of our soul, all of our mind and all of our strength. So we will engage our minds, sometimes He gives us silence to make us think.

Perhaps an example of that comes from Psalm 143:7-10. David must have been experiencing the silence of God and it was making him think:

<sup>7</sup> *Answer me quickly, O LORD; my spirit fails.*

*Do not hide your face from me or I will be like those who go down to the pit.*

<sup>8</sup> *Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you.*

*Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.*

<sup>9</sup> *Rescue me from my enemies, O LORD, for I hide myself in you.*

<sup>10</sup> *Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.*

"Teach me to do your will," pleaded David. It looks like God's silence was helping him learn that obedience to the will of the Lord is the pathway to blessing.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Last summer, Sandy and I went to Cologne, Germany, so she could receive experimental medical treatment. Cologne is a lovely, historic city on the Rhine River.

During the Second World War, Cologne was one of those cities where the Nazis searched for Jews to arrest, imprison and execute. I recently read that on a wall in a cellar in Cologne, where Jews had hidden from the Nazis, an inscription was written by an anonymous author: "*I believe in the sun even when it is not shining. I believe in love even when not feeling it. I believe in God even when he is silent.*"

It can take great faith to believe in God even when He is silent. It can require tremendous perseverance to worship God even when He is silent. It can demand enormous discipline to obey God even when He is silent. But know this: when He is silent, it is for a reason.

All of us have sinned and come short of God's plan for our lives. Each of us is living beneath his privilege. We've all been seduced by Satan and have wandered from our Father and from His home. Through His son, Jesus Christ, God has invited us to come back home. But Jesus will not

02/01/09

try to out shout the world. He will not attempt to play our game and overpower us. He will not endeavor to drag us back to the Father. No, instead, softly and tenderly He will call us to come home. Listen.  
[SILENCE] Is He speaking to you now? Will you come?

**INVITATION SONG:**        #479 *“Softly and Tenderly”*