

Sermon to the Saints of God assembled at Topeka, KS: Sunday, September 14, 2014

Hebrews 12:4-13 “Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.”

Chastening, trials, afflictions – they are a continual part of our lives. It isn't a strange thing, or a new thing, but it is the way of all flesh, and in a particular way, it is the lot of the elect of God. Gramps said that there are twin blessings that each and every one of the elect of God receives – to believe, and to suffer for the sake of Christ.

1Peter 4:12-13 “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.”

Beloved, we are often in a state of affliction – consider the words of Moses:

Psalm 90:7-12 “For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy

wrath. So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”

We often find ourselves in the midst of affliction - even our strength is labor and sorrow. Affliction of our bodies; Affliction in our circumstances; Affliction in our hearts. When I consider the tender souls in this room, I know your many afflictions, and I am grieved for them. The fact that we are grieved for the afflictions of Joseph is a hallmark that is unique to the elect of God. We are each grieved when we see the hand of a just, righteous God afflicting one of the sheep, as we are touched in our souls by our own sin, and how worthy we are of all such afflictions, and worse, including hell! That is the perspective of the sheep, beloved – humble, obedient thanksgiving for the Lord Jesus Christ. The goats don’t believe that they deserve the least sorrow, and believe that they can overcome it by their own will, and therefore overcome the God that appointed it.

The scriptures are filled with words about this topic of affliction; there are many topics that relate to affliction, and many wonderful truths to be searched out. Today (and next week, Lord willing), I want to focus on one particular aspect: Maintaining a godly silence in our hearts, while we are under affliction. Let’s begin that analysis with Micah chapter 4. The first three chapters of Micah are filled with prophecies of destruction, captivity, and sorrow for the rebellious house of Judah. Chapter 4 speaks to the sheep, and gives promises of mercy in the midst of great affliction.

Micah 4:8-13 “And thou, O tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem. Now why dost thou cry out aloud? is there no king in thee? is thy counsellor perished? for pangs have taken thee as a woman in travail. Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail: for now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and thou shalt dwell in the field, and thou shalt go even to Babylon; there shalt thou be delivered; there the LORD shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies. Now also many nations are gathered against thee, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion. But they know not the thoughts of the LORD, neither understand they his counsel: for he shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor. Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion: for I will make thine horn iron, and I will make thy hoofs brass: and thou shalt beat in pieces many people: and I will consecrate their gain unto the LORD, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth.”

There is amazing comfort here. My particular focus for today is on verses 9 and 10. The proposition is that there is a right spirit, and a wrong spirit to have when facing

affliction. It appears that they were thrashing around under the weight of this affliction, “crying out loud”, for which he admonishes them. It’s not the fact that they were crying, but that they were crying out in their spirits, in a hopeless and faithless fashion. “Is there no king in thee? Is thy counsellor perished?” They had abandoned proper thoughts of the God that appointed the affliction, and who has promised the deliverance. Their thoughts were wrapped up with the destruction of their earthly king, counsellors, and kingdom, and their own anguish, rather than looking to their true King and kingdom, and to align their thinking with the perfect will of the sovereign Creator.

In verse 10, Micah tells them the remedy: “Be in pain, and labour to bring forth like a woman in travail” – but know that the birth, the deliverance, is coming! The Lord has promised many things to us, beloved, the most precious of those promises are not temporal, earthly things, they are eternal things! Whatever afflictions we face in this life pale in comparison to what we actually deserve, and to the eternal joy that shortly awaits us! The metaphor of childbirth that the prophet uses here is powerful, and is used numerous times in the scriptures. We can all understand the concepts at play, but for those who have experienced childbirth, or who have witnessed childbirth, it is particularly impactful. The labor, sorrow, and pain that is associated with childbirth was specifically appointed by God as a part of the curse when sin entered the world at the Garden of Eden. It is a particular pain that is unique, unmistakable, and unstoppable. When labor comes upon a woman, it is an absolute show stopper. There is no avoiding it. There is no ignoring it. There is no stopping it. There is no delaying it. It becomes the singular focus. I have watched my wife settle down into that pain, with a hope: the birth is coming. That pain – that affliction – is the ONLY way that you will arrive at the promised deliverance.

1Timothy 2:13-15 “For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.”

Clearly that doesn’t mean that women’s souls are saved by childbirth, nor can it mean that godly women are saved from death in childbirth [as some expositors say], because we know that godly women have died in that way. What it must mean, is that both women and men, being full of faith (God’s elect) are saved by the Lord Jesus Christ who arrived in the flesh through the means of that affliction called childbirth. How marvelous is that concept, that the very affliction itself carries with it the deliverance! The way that Jesus Christ arrived in the flesh, was through the affliction and pain from the curse of the fall that necessitates his sacrifice in the first place!

Consider also, that once you have received the promise, the affliction is forgotten, and is fully eclipsed by joy! Consider the consolation and overwhelming joy, when a new babe is laid upon his mother's breast! The anguish is forgotten in an instant!

John 16:20,21 “Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.”

Having considered Micah 4, and seeing that we don't want to be found hopelessly “crying out loud” under our afflictions, let us look at the proper frame for our souls – a godly silence. To examine this topic, I will borrow heavily from Thomas Brooks' book “The Mute Christian Under the Smarting Rod”, as I believe it to be instructive, comforting, and well organized.

Brooks launches his analysis from Psalm 39:9, where we find David under a weighty affliction. Gill suggests that it is during the time while David was on the run from Absalom. Let's look at the Psalm in it's entirety:

Psalm 39:1-13 “To the chief Musician, even to Jeduthun, A Psalm of David. I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me. I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred. My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue, LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah. Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them. And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee. Deliver me from all my transgressions: make me not the reproach of the foolish. I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it. Remove thy stroke away from me: I am consumed by the blow of thine hand. When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth: surely every man is vanity. Selah. Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears: for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were. O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more.”

Again, specifically, our focus is verse 9: “I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it.”

The Hebrew word “alam” is translated here as “I was dumb” meaning “Put to silence, mute, tongue-tied, bound”. The sight of God’s hand in the afflictions that were upon him, makes him lay a law of silence upon his heart and tongue. “I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it.” He looks through all secondary causes to the first cause, and his soul is silent: he sees a hand of God in all, and so sits mute and quiet in his soul. The sight of God in an affliction is of an irresistible efficacy to silence the heart, and to stop the mouth of a gracious man.

The proposition is this: That it is the great duty and concernment of gracious souls to be mute and silent in their souls under the greatest afflictions, the saddest providences, and sharpest trials that they meet with in this world.

Brooks breaks his analysis into four questions:

1. What is this godly silence *not*?
2. What does a godly, gracious, holy, silence require?
3. What does this godly silence *not* require?
4. Why should we maintain this godly silence?

What is *not* this godly silence?

Let’s consider 6 types of silence that are *not* godly silence, in order to better understand what IS godly silence:

1. **Stoical Silence**: The stoics of old thought it altogether below a man that hath reason or understanding either to rejoice in any good, or to mourn for any evil; but this stoical silence is such a sinful insensibleness as is very provoking to a holy God. It is a heathenish and a horrid sin to be without natural affections (Romans 1:31). Certainly if the loss of a child in the house be no more to thee than the loss of a chicken in the yard, thy heart is base and sordid, and thou mayest well expect some sore awakening judgment. Such people think it below the greatness and magnanimity of their spirits to be moved, affected, or afflicted with any afflictions that befall them. But this stoical silence, which is but a sinful sullenness, is not the silence here meant.
2. **Politie Silence**: Many are silent out of policy. Should they not be silent, they should lay themselves more open either to the rage and fury of men, or else to the plots and designs of men: to prevent which they are silent, and will lay their hands upon their mouths, that others might not lay their hands upon their estates, lives, or liberties: ‘And Saul also went home to Gibeah, and there went

with him a band of men, whose hearts God had touched. But the children of Belial said, How shall this man save us? and they despised him, and brought him no presents; but he held his peace,' or was as though he had been deaf, 1Samuel 10:26, 27. This new king being but newly entered upon his kingly government, and observing his condition to be but mean and low, his friends but few, and his enemies many and potent, sons of Belial, prudently and politically chooses rather to lay his hand upon his mouth than to take a wolf by the ear or a lion by the beard. Saul knew this was a time for silence. But this is not the silence the proposition speaks of.

3. Foolish Silence: Some fools can neither do well nor speak well, and because they cannot say what they should, they are so wise as to be mute: Proverbs 17:28, 'Even a fool, when he holds his peace, is counted wise, and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.' As he cannot be wise that speaks much, so he cannot be known for a fool that says nothing. There are many wise fools in the world; there are many silly fools, who, by holding their tongues, gain the credit and honour of being discreet men. But this foolish silence is not the silence here meant.
4. Sullen Silence: Many, to gratify their pride and lust, are sullenly silent; these are troubled with a dumb devil, which was the worst devil of all the devils you read of in the Scripture, Mark 9:17-28. Certainly there is a generation amongst us, who, when they are under the afflicting hand of God, have no mouths to plead with God, no lips to praise God, nor no tongues to justify God. These are possessed with a dumb devil; and this dumb devil had possessed Ahab for a time: 1Kings 21:4, 'And Ahab came into his house, heavy and displeased, and laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread.' Ahab's covetous, idolatrous ambitions being crossed, he is resolved to starve himself, and to die of the sullen. A sullen silence is both a sin and a punishment. No devil frets and vexes, wears and wastes the spirits of a man, like this dumb devil, like this sullen silence. But this is not the silence here meant.
5. Forced Silence: Many are silent by force. He that is under the power of his enemy, though he suffer many hard things, yet he is silent under his sufferings, because he knows he is liable to worse; he that hath taken away his liberty, may take away his life; he that hath taken away his money, may take off his head; he that hath made him bleed in the foot, may make him bleed in the throat if he will not be still and quiet: and this works silence by force. So, when many are under the afflicting hand of God, conscience tells them that now they are under the hand of a powerful enemy, and the power of that God whom they have angered which hath taken away one child, may take away every child. Even the Philistines were aware of the rod of God upon them with the plagues of the mice and emerods. The thoughts and sense of these things makes many a sinner silent under the

hand of God; but this is but a forced silence! As the cudgel forces the dog to be quiet and still, and the rod forces the child to be silent and mute, so the apprehensions of what God hath done, and of what God may do, forces many a soul to be silent, Jeremiah 3:10, 1 Kings 14:5-18. But this is not the silence here meant: a forced silence is no silence in the eye of God.

6. Despairing Silence: A despairing soul is Magor-missabib, a terror to himself; he hath a hell in his heart, and horror in his conscience. He looks upwards, and there he beholds God frowning, and Christ bleeding; he looks inwards, and there he finds conscience accusing and condemning of him; he looks on the one side of him, and there he hears all his sins crying out, We are thine, and we will follow thee; we will to the grave with thee, we will to judgment with thee, and from judgment we will to hell with thee; he looks on the other side of him, and there he sees infernal fiends in fearful shapes, amazing and terrifying him, and waiting to receive his despairing soul as soon as she shall take her leave of his wretched body; he looks above him, and there he sees the gates of heaven shut against him; he looks beneath him, and there he sees hell gaping for him; and under these sad sights, he is full of secret conclusions against his own soul. There is mercy for others, saith the despairing soul, but none for me; grace and favour for others, but none for me; pardon and peace for others, but none for me; blessedness and happiness for others, but none for me: there is no help, there is no help, no, Jeremiah 2:25, 18:12. But this is not the silence here meant.

There is a godly silence, a prudent silence, a holy, gracious silence; a silence that springs from prudent and holy principles, and from gracious causes and considerations; and this is the silence here meant. And this silence is what we will delve further into, Lord willing, next week.

I love you all. Amen.