

Women & More

Silent Eloquence

February 13, 2014

Prelude to our study of the *silent eloquence* required for **awe of our God** and the **suffering of others**, we will peer into the human near incapacity to be sincere—because of self: interest, effort and ambition. When Paul exhorts us to “*rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn*” in Romans 12:15, he has first warned in verse 9 that “*love must be sincere.*” We will absolutely need God’s help to be genuine and sincere in our relationships and any commiserations. We will need agape’ to the fullest degree! And notice that we are not to do the rejoicing and mourning from afar, but “*with those*” who rejoice and mourn.

Far too many of us are better at mourning with those who mourn than rejoicing with those who rejoice, because we may feel an advantage in the mourning. Woe to that wickedness: If we see in ourselves any of that, we must repent! When a sister is succeeding where we are struggling; when she has lost noticeable weight and we have not; or when an abundance of any description has come to her, we must not even notice ‘self’, but *rejoice* with her fully and remain sincerely happy for her blessings.

And **we must commiserate with**—have pity on—**the joyful**, as well as the mournful, because when one has been abundantly blessed, there is the greater potential to forget God—“satisfied with earth, we are content to do without heaven” as Charles Spurgeon puts it: “Oh, what leanness of soul and neglect of spiritual things have been brought on through the very mercies and bounties of God! Yet this is not a matter of necessity, for the apostle tells us that he knew how to abound.” Paul in Philippians 4:12-13 says, “*I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13I can do everything through him who gives me strength.*”

We will need to pray Christ’s strength for those who have been greatly blessed! So there is vital ministry in rejoicing and commiserating with those upon whom abundance has landed: to check ourselves at the altar, first, so that we can genuinely “*rejoice with those who rejoice.*”

Now we come to the one who is overwhelmed with grief and mourning, and our need for *silent eloquence*. Other than the tremendous and incomparable suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in Scripture suffered more than Job? A whole Bible Book—42 chapters—is dedicated to his experience. Someone has said that “experience is what we get when we didn’t get what we wanted,” and certainly grief and loss is not what anyone wants.

When three of Job's friends heard of his great and innumerable losses, they agreed to meet together to console and comfort him. When they arrived and saw his suffering, they did a few things right: First, they **wept for him**—mournful, sustained 'crying' for his situation. Second, they **humbled themselves**—ceremonially putting dust on their heads and tearing their robes. And third, they sat with their friend for seven days and seven nights and **said not a word!**

All these actions were a cultural thing in that day, so that the good that they did before they began to speak was a mandate which they honored. Job 2:11-13:

*"When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, **heard about** all the troubles that had come upon him, **they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him.** 12When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. 13Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, **because they saw how great his suffering was.**"*

They **saw** how great his suffering was! When we enter the realm of the sufferer, our mouths need to be brought up short—standing silent and waiting on God's direction. It may be that *silence* is the order of the day or even days. Sentiments like "I know how you feel" or "I understand your pain" can be a slap in the face to the already overwhelmed. Someone has said: "Silence can be beautiful and impressive; don't break it unless you can improve on it." Sometimes the noblest thing we can do for the suffering is to stop and sit; stay and be silent:

- when their spouse has died, or
 - stopped loving them and walked away;
- when their child has been taken, or
 - their teenager is estranged by sin;
- when their diagnosis is death, or
 - chronic pain will dominate their life;
- when they were the only one to survive the crash, and
 - they were at the wheel;
- when their earthly home was swept away, or
 - reduced to ashes in their sight;
- when their guilt is overwhelming, and
 - forgiveness has been denied;
- when failure crashes in on them, and
 - creditors press hard;
- when bitterness comes 'home' to roost, and
 - they get...*what we all deserve!*

What should we say? What will we say? These are questions we ponder when any opportunity to minister commiseration to the grieving occurs. But the *eloquence of silence* can be a more loving blessing or smoother balm than one well-chosen word. Let wisdom guide us in our influence to know when to exercise this virtue! Psalm 139:4-6 “*Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. 5You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. 6Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.*”

Wonder, awe; Grief, loss

Let words cease; be silent all

Time for speech will come again

But for now let no word fall.



As soft snow upon the earth

Spreads a blanket like a pall

Words will fail; actions stall

Silent eloquence will call.

1/10—R. Jeanene Moore

“There are seasons when to be still demands immeasurably higher strength than to act,” says Margaret Bottome. Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7b assures us: “*There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven... 7a time to be silent and a time to speak.*” Scripture asserts there is a time to speak. There is no advantage to the fact that one tends to speak while some tend to be silent, as both need to yield to God’s wisdom! We can ask God—James 1:5—to discern the time for silence and the time for speech, and he will be faithful to let us know—as we listen!

Ezekiel 3:15 begins: “*I came to the exiles who lived at Tel Abib near the Kebar River.*

And there where they were living, I sat among them for seven days—overwhelmed.” There’s that cultural ‘submissive-sit with silence’ again.

Verse 16 advances: “*At the end of the seven days the word of the LORD came to me. 17Son of Man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. 18When I say to a wicked man, ‘You will surely die’, and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood.*

19“*But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself.*

20“*Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness, and does evil, and I put a stumbling block before him, he will die. Since you did not warn him, he will die for his sin. The righteous things he did will not be remembered, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. 21But if you do warn the righteous man not to sin and he does not sin, he will surely live because he took warning, and you will have saved yourself.*”

We are to speak warning to the unrighteous—unsaved—and the righteous who turn back into sin! We are to be careful to use God’s wisdom and his word when we do this, because we are at risk of sinning in and through our own words. We are to be clear—speaking God’s Word—calling those to Christ who are living in sin, and strongly exhorting our sister who has wandered away to return. 2 Timothy 4:2-4 ***“Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men (women) will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”***

Titus 1:9 *“He (the one speaking) must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”* Titus 2:1 *“You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.”* Doctrine is truth of God; taught by God—doctrine is not at the whim of human interpretation. There is a ‘truth’ spoken in Scripture: spoken by the Truth—Jesus Christ. ***“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness...”*** says 2 Timothy 3:16.

♥The rebellion that I had indulged throughout childhood and that plagued my teen years surfaced predictably as a young wife to the point that an older woman wrote me an anonymous letter—it was lovingly written with the wisdom of a godly older woman. She chided me from God’s Word, stating that her prayer for me was that I would yield to God’s authority, and through that to my husband’s authority. She strongly advised that I take a course called the *Philosophy of Christian Womanhood*. After I repented of a ‘mad’ and ‘how-dare-her’ attitude, I fell on my face and asked God to give me the opportunity to take this course—He did and I did and then ended up teaching it! Amy Carmichael, missionary and poet wrote: “If you’ve never been hurt by a word from God, it’s probably that you’ve never heard God speak.”

-Don’t remain silent when Wisdom says speak! The author of Hebrews wrote: *“Remember those...who spoke the Word of God to you; and consider the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.”* In the story of God’s faithfulness to his people in Esther 4:14, Mordecai warns his Queen, cousin and former charge: *“For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this.”* God used the well-chosen—laced-with-wisdom and heeded—words of Queen Esther to bring about deliverance for Mordecai and all of the Jews in Persia! Erwin McManus says, “If you want to seize your divine moments, you must accept that you are on a divine mission.”

-God-prompted words: When Jesus is before Pilate in Matthew 27:19, Scripture tells us: “*While Pilate was sitting on the judge’s seat, his wife sent him this message: ‘**Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man**, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.’*” The warning words were not heeded by Pilate, but credit is given to his wife for speaking them in Scripture as a witness!

-God given go-words: The women at the tomb, in Matthew 28:7, 9-10, were given a message to deliver to the disciples—twice! “*The angel said to the women ‘Then **go quickly and tell his disciples** ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’*”
⁹“*Suddenly Jesus met them. ‘Greetings,’ he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. **Go and tell my brothers** to go to Galilee; there they will see me.’*”

-God’s ‘Truth’ expounded: In Acts 18:26, a husband and wife instruct a preacher in doctrine—truth of God taught by God. “*He (Apollos) began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.*”

FYI: The topic of this lesson is our influence, and the category is our role as a wife. We’ve not said much about our influence on our husbands, but we can see it radiating throughout. Scripture definitely says that a wife can and will have an influence on her husband. Let us make our words count for the gospel, and use wisdom to know when to cease from them. Someone has quipped: “Often the difference between a successful marriage and a mediocre one consists of leaving about three or four things a day unsaid.”

When the soul is overwhelmed with thoughts of the suffering Savior—silently adoring, eloquently without voice—put shoes from off your soul’s feet. Holy ground is entered! Charles Spurgeon: “Who can be astonished at anything, when he has once been astonished at the manger and the cross?” When words will not add to our worship, be still—let our eloquence be exhibited in our silence: Remain in awe of him; believe *Who* he says he is, trust that he has done all that he says he will do, and fear his displeasure. “*The fear—awe—of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*” and it will bring about reverence for him!

Dr. David Jeremiah, “The thought of God is always larger than the measure of a man’s mind.” So, when God is speaking we should not only have reverent awe, but we should be speechless. God’s hearing-ear hears all the trees in the forest clap their hands: he hears the inaudible to us. And our God is pleased to hear the eloquently silent—“*be still and know that I am God*”—reverent ‘awe’ that we offer up to him!