

## THE WISDOM OF DIVINE SILENCE

We have just been singing that Zion's night has been long and mournful. This is true to an extent not always easy to realise in days like ours, of comparative liberty and well being. Past times have been very dreadful, both for Israel after the flesh and Israel after the Spirit. It is well to know this as we may from history. It helps us to be thankful for privileges which we might underrate; and it helps us to estimate aright the time in which we live as a time of the ending of God's displeasure to Israel, and a time of the ending of the triumph of wickedness over His people. We are drawing towards the time of the return of God's favours to His long down-trodden land and nation. We are nearing the day of light and gladness and honour for the house of Christ after the long prevalence of darkness and misery and shame.

But though the night watches are nearly over, the day has not yet come. We are still in the darkness though children of the day. We are made to feel this more intensely as we come more and more into sympathy with the things that belong to the day. The night is truly dreadful still. We are delivered from the violence of man, but not from his unmercy and contempt. He cannot take life or property in the name of the law, but by means of the law, and in a hundred ways without the law he can crush and blight and destroy. Human diabolism is regulated and restrained, but it is human diabolism still, reigning around us in wide wastes of darkness, and killing with its icy chill the tender plants of righteousness that struggle to come from the heavenly seed. Thankful we are to see the power taken away from the odious ecclesiasticism that once held the dearest of human liberties in iron thralldom even in Britain, who boasts herself as the land of the free; but how much more gladdened shall we be to see the arm of the Lord made bare in the eyes of all the nations so that the authority of His law and His claim to our worship shall no longer rest on argument, but be thrust home into every human bosom by the evidence of eyesight and the logic of resistless events.

Perhaps the most oppressive feature of the night is the divine silence for the time being. Not a syllable of utterance; not a glimmer of discernible operation. We are put through David's experience.

*"My tears have been my meat day and night while they say unto me, where is thy God?"*

It would be a strong answer to the enemy—it would be a tower of strength to ourselves—if we had but one single token from on high—the briefest word of recognition or guidance. But such we are not permitted to have. Such we cannot have. Let us use our reason, and we shall be helped to adjust ourselves to the position and to endure. For want of this, some have grown weary and have given in. For want of it we are in danger of the same, "*Be ye not as the ox or the mule which have no understanding;*" so are we commanded. Let us survey the facts and we shall be strengthened. First of all, the night is not so long as it seems. We look back to the many centuries it has lasted, and we have a kind of a feeling as if we had lived those centuries and had been in the darkness all the time it has brooded upon the earth. In the same way, we look forward to the days it may yet have to last, with the feeling that these days also are ours. This is an illusion of the mental mirrors with which the inner man is lined. It is liable to be an oppressive illusion if we do not dispel it by the recollection that our short human life is all the measurement of the night for us. We have not had the centuries that elapsed before we were born; we shall not have the days that will run if we have to go to the grave before the coming of the Lord. Our experience of evil is limited to the short day man is permitted to live on the earth. That day will soon be over, with all its futility and pain—we know not how soon; and there is this happy thought about it, that when it is gone, it will never return. There is nothing we forget so soon as trouble when it is over. The only thing left of trouble for us will be the good it has done; for it does good. Evil has a mission. Evil is from God in the execution of His own plans. "*The days wherein we have seen evil*" are not

thrown away. They are not waste. They are grievous while they last, but they accomplish a work with those “*who are the called according to His purpose.*” We may not know all they accomplish, but we can see this, that no creature can be brought to that constant and cordial and delighted sense of dependence which is the first qualification for eternal fellowship with the Father of all life without suffering. A life of suffering tends to break into the self-contentment, self-consciousness, and self-sufficiency that is natural to mere self-enjoyment. It prepares us in the right spirit to pray the prayer of Moses, the man of God:

*“Return, O Lord, how long? Let it repent Thee concerning Thy servants. O satisfy us early with Thy mercy . . . Make us glad according to the days wherein Thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. Let Thy work appear unto Thy servants, and Thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us.”*

We are enabled to reconcile ourselves to the silence of God in the present age when we call to mind a few evident truths about it.

- (1) That “*there is a time to speak and a time to be silent.*” God is not silent without first having spoken, and without having furnished us of later times evidence of His having spoken. This evidence is in all the world if men had but eyes to see. In nothing is it more powerfully evident than in the existence and extensive circulation of the Bible itself which is its own witness to those who can read and judge.
- (2) Having during a period of over 2,000 years, counting from Noah, spoken at sundry times and in divers manners, He is the sole judge of the time to be silent, and of this He also informed men in advance, telling them that He would cease communication, and “*for a long time hold His peace*” (Amos 8:11, 12; Micah 3:6, 7; Isa. 42:14). It is therefore in proper season that there should now prevail the silence which is so oppressive to the soul that hungers and thirsts after God.
- (3) There is wisdom in the silence so far as the development of God’s children is concerned. It is faithful men and women He wants—men and women who act a faithful part as the result of knowledge received. How could such a class be developed if He constantly made His presence manifest? Leaving us thus alone in severe silence with His Word, we are thrown upon ourselves, and become manifest to ourselves and others in what we do under such circumstances. If God were openly among us, our service would be liable to be eye service. Servants naturally act circumspectly under the eye of the master. Let the master withdraw himself, and the difference between faithful and unfaithful servants becomes manifest. In this very silence, then, is our opportunity; for it is upon what we do now, left all alone in the unexciting common place circumstances of everyday life, with the Word of God in our hands for direction, that our future will be decided. If we could but see the day of opportunity in the light in which it will certainly appear to us when we look back upon it from the standpoint of Christ’s arrival on the earth, we would be more diligently faithful than it is to be feared most of us are. The profitableness of these meetings rests in their tendency to help us to do this, by setting before us “*the terror of the Lord*” and the “*exceeding joy*” that is associated with his coming.

Of this “*exceeding joy*” we have had a glimpse in our readings from Zechariah and the Apocalypse. In Zechariah, the “*man whose name is the Branch*” is before us as the builder of the temple of the Lord. Who this is there is no room to doubt. The learning of today would deprive us of our confidence; but we need not be moved by it. There is a great

deal of nonsense underneath the highly polished talk of modern times. The understanding of the Scriptures as a whole is essential to the understanding of its parts, and we ‘know’ that the learned do not possess this qualification. By the understanding of god’s purpose in Christ, and the clues to right interpretation which are dropped here and there throughout the apostolic writings, we are able to recognise Christ in many places where he is not visible to the merely learned reader. We see him in the Law of Moses and we see him in personations of the prophets where, to the uninstructed eye, nothing but the natural elements of the case are visible. This case of “*the man whose name is the Branch*” is an instance. On the surface of things, it would seem as if the prophecy did not go further than Joshua, the high priest, and the temple that was built on the return from Babylon. Zechariah was instructed to say to Joshua, in the presence of witnesses,

“*Behold the man whose name is The Branch,*” as if to say,

“*This Joshua is the man . . . and he shall build the temple of the Lord.*”

But looking earlier and deeper, we see the prophecy goes much further, extending even to Christ, the testimony for whom is the very “*spirit of prophecy*” (Rev. 19:10). “*The Branch*” was spoken before to Zechariah. We find him introduced first in chapter 3 verse 8, in connection with a series of highly symbolical transactions. In one of these, Joshua stood before the angel that brought the vision to Zechariah, “*clothed with filthy garments,*” to represent iniquity and its mortal nature. The angel ordered these filthy garments to be removed and a fair mitre to be put upon his head, and clean garments to be put on—styled a change of raiment, the typical nature of which having been indicated, the angel delivered a message from God to Joshua to the effect that if Joshua pleased Him by conforming to His will, he (Joshua) would be exalted to a place among the angels, described as “*those that stand by*” (Zech. 3:7). Then we have the Branch introduced as the solution of the apparent mystery of how such a goodness could be conferred. “*For behold, I will bring forth my servant THE BRANCH,*” in connection with whom, the prophecy proceeds to intimate that God would “*remove the iniquity of the land in one day.*” “*Joshua and thy fellows that sit before thee*” are informed that they were “*men of sign*” in the case. Consequently, when, three chapters further on, (viz., in the chapter read this morning) we find crowns placed on the head of Joshua and given to his fellows, we witness a transaction which is in its nature a type or sign, the applicability of which is placed beyond conjecture by the history and teaching of the New Testament concerning Jesus and his brethren. Here we are plainly told concerning the prophets that the spirit of Christ was in them, testifying beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. There was peculiar appropriateness in using Joshua as a type of Christ, because of his name, his office, and his work. His name is the name of Jesus . . . not merely that it has the same meaning as Jesus, but that it is the same name. Jesus is but the form of the Hebrew Joshua or Yah-hoshua, when it has come through the Greek language into English. It is therefore as if Zechariah had said, “Behold in this Jesus, son of Josedec, the type of the man whose name is The Branch; for the man whose name is The Branch shall be called Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.” Then, as to his office, Joshua, son of Josedec, was AARONIC HIGH PRIEST, in which capacity he was the already constituted type of him who is the real intercessor between God and man unto life eternal. Then as to his work, Joshua had to build in the temple of God on the return of the nation from captivity in Babylon. In this also he fitly represented the Melchisedec High Priest, who is not only the builder of the spiritual temple of living stones, but who at the restoration from the modern Babylon will build the latter house, spoken of by Haggai and shown to Ezekiel, whose glory will exceed all former temples—to which the nations will seek, in which the throne of the lord will be established, and in which peace will be assured to all the world. Then “*the crowns will be to them of the captivity,*” even to Joshua and his fellows (Jesus and his brethren), who after long and bitter suffering, will reign in glory. “*And they that are far off*

*shall come and build in the temple of the Lord,*” and then, says the prophet, as representing Christ, *“shall ye know that the Lord of Hosts hath sent me unto you.”* There is wonderful force in this as applied to the situation of affairs that will exist when Jesus is manifested in the earth as Yahweh’s servant, *“to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel”* (Isa. 49:6). When Jesus presented himself to Israel at his first appearing, they denied that the Lord of Hosts had sent him unto them. For 18 centuries they have been permitted to blaspheme his name in all the countries in which they have been scattered for their sins. What can they say when, at his return, he shows himself to be their Messiah in the expulsion of the enemy from the land, in the rebuilding of desolate cities, and when *“they that are afar off,”* the sons of the stranger, troop in glad crowds from all lands at his summons to build up their walls, yea, even to *“build in the temple of the Lord.”* Mild but powerful are the words *“Ye shall know that the Lord of Hosts hath sent me unto you.”* The knowledge of it will humble them as never nation has been humbled. They mourn and are ashamed to discover that he whom their fathers crucified and whose name they have execrated with every bitterness of malediction during the long night of their dispersion, is the very Son of the living God. Such an arrangement is a beautiful triumph of divine wisdom. A nation exalted as the Jewish nation will be, as the first people of the kingdom of God under Christ would be liable to that pride which has been shown by the imperial peoples of all history, and which is seen more or less in every metropolis of the present day—a sentiment utterly inadmissible in the Kingdom of God. The way to it has been barred by the Jewish rejection of Christ. They will have nothing to boast of, but everything to be abased about. Their very existence at all will be a monument of mercy. *“An afflicted and a poor people,” “all righteous,” “rejoicing in the Lord,”* is the picture we have of them in the glad day when *“righteousness shall spring out of the earth and mercy shall look down from heaven.”* It is the national application of the principle observed in the selection of the highest apostles—Peter and Paul. Peter was allowed to deny his master; Paul, to persecute him in the persons of his brethren. They never could forget it.

*“I am not worthy to be called an apostle.”*

The effect was to humble themselves in their own eyes—an essential qualification for the doing of any work of God. It is revealed that no man is acceptable with god who is proud. This is in accordance with the purest reason; man the powerless, favoured, permitted offspring of ALMIGHTY POWER, must be odious in the eyes of both God and man when swayed by a sentiment so out of keeping with his real standing in creation. *“That no flesh should glory in His sight,”* is the result aimed at in all His dealings with man. It is the explanation of the present position of the Truth; and here the matter comes home to ourselves. Just consider the position: here is the Truth revived in our day in all its noble symmetry; in all its pure grace; in all its intellectual and moral beauty; so adapted to elevate and ennoble; so exactly fitted to supply every human need; and to solve every human difficulty in connection with the mighty problems of philosophy and politics that have for ages vexed the mind of man—The Bible Understood! The Scriptures Unveiled! In harmony with every field of knowledge that an age of experiment and discovery has explored. And yet, where is the wonderful attainment situate? Where accessible? How regarded? You know: in the mire, in the ditch of human society. A man has to step out of the respectabilities who lays hold of it. No more complete eclipse of social light can befall a man than that which happens when he accepts the conclusions to which the Truth commits him. What is the cause of this? There may be various causes, but there can be no doubt that the root-cause of all is this, our maintenance of the Bible teaching that no man can hope for eternal life who has not believed in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and had been baptised into his name. This is the great offence of the Truth, which leads it to be a social outcast, and its believers to be hated and derided of all classes. No words are too strong to express the intensity of their scorn. This is not pleasant to

be endured. The very reverse. It is what no sane man would submit to without a strong reason. But the reason is very strong. We have truth on our side. The world—some portion of it—professes to believe the Bible to be the truth, and yet will not be guided by it. They misrepresent the issue. They say “Nobody fit to be saved but you Christadelphians!” That is not it at all. We make no boast of ourselves at all; God forbid! We say we are poor worms of the earth like all men, and that we have no hope of god’s forgiveness and favour except by submission to the way He has provided in Christ. And we say that that way is the Truth, and that the things believed by the clerical world are not the truth, but fables, and all this we prove. And we further say, that God is no respecter of persons, and that what is true of us is true of all men—that there is but one way—one gospel—one hope for all. For this the Truth is hated as no religion under the sun is hated, and this being hated is a dreadful trial to those who are of the Truth. Well, it is part of God’s arrangement that the Kingdom of God can only be entered through great tribulation. In the apostolic age this tribulation took one form. In our day of liberty, it takes another. But the practical result is the same. We are made to realise that the path of obedience is a path of suffering, and the time of waiting a time of endurance.

And in view of what it ultimately means it is not unreasonable that it should be so. Exaltation is rightly preceded by suffering in a form that puts men to the proof. It is to exaltation we are called. It is not to the present circumstances of powerlessness and humiliation that we are called, except as part of the whole process. We are “*called to the Kingdom and glory of God,*” and what that is we gather from such a brilliant symbolic scene as is described in the chapter read from the Apocalypse—a rainbow canopied throne occupied by a dazzling figure established on a glassy sea, and surrounded by four living creatures sparkling with eyes which the words they utter identify with the glorified congregation of the saints.

*“Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, and hast made us unto our God kings and priests and we shall reign on the earth.”*

The glorious purport of this symbolism we get at by an inverse process applied to that other symbolism, whose literal counterpart we behold in the corrupt and blighting system of things that has prevailed in Europe for many centuries, and which, with modifications exists in all its baleful vigour in our own day. That symbolism is hideous; a non-descript scaring sea monster, with many heads, and ridden by an inebriate harlot in gaudy finery. We know there are no such literal objects anywhere. They were but the hieroglyphic signs or types of things that were to arise among the nations of Europe through the fermentation of human passions left to shape themselves in the absence of divine compulsion. We see the things themselves in the institutions of Church and State that now give shape to human life upon the earth. The ugly vision that John saw was but the symbolic prophecy of them. So the throne and the glassy sea and the four living ones are but the symbols of another order of things to come after them. This other order of things is the kingdom of God—most glorious.

To this we have been called. When it comes, it will be as real as ever the kingdoms of men have been, the nightmare of the present world will have passed away. To reign with Christ is the highest exaltation conceivable; no marvel, then, that the preparation should be in circumstances of deepest shame and sorrow. In this Jesus himself preceded us. His life was a life of labour, reproach, sorrow.

*“If we suffer with him, we shall also reign.”*

Taken from: - “Seasons of Comfort” Vol. 2 Pages 119-125

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