

Draw Near 5

Silence, March 31

Purpose

God has given us one mouth and two ears, that should tell us we need to be silent and listen. The scripture in many places speaks of how the people were silent before God, but we often gloss over those in looking for God to speak to us. Sometimes we need to be silent to be able to know God's will. This lesson will help us reconnect with God through the practice of silence.

Sharing Time

Review Devotionals: Has everyone completed all four devotionals from this past week? There is no penalty for not completing them. They are there to help you and guide you. Let's share for a minute what we have learned from those you have done.

Learning Experience

1. Introduction:
 1. Today we will finish up our focus on the piety in the Sermon on the Mount by discussing silence in piety. As one thinks of silence in a relationship, one thinks of two different kinds of silence.
 2. Negative silence in a relationship is the abandonment of conversation, the "silent treatment" going on between two people. The lack of an apology or blessing or expression of love. This is a negative silence in a relationship
 3. Positive silence in a relationship is when two people are very comfortable sitting together and their silence is filled with love for each other. They may touch, they may hold hands, or they may just be together. There may be small statements made to another in half an hour, and that is all. But both are very comfortable. Many of you have known parents who are able to read books together and not say a word to each other for an hour but just enjoy each other's company.
2. Read 1 Kings 19:1-13.
 1. This is a familiar scripture to us. The story of Elijah the day after he overcomes all the prophets of Baal and shows that God Almighty is on his throne over Israel. But Jezebel threatens to kill him, so Elijah runs. He ends up on Mount Sinai/Horeb. God enables him to get there. He ends up in a cave.

2. "Gentle Whisper" The Hebrew word used here can mean "sound of sheer silence" and "still small voice." How does one translate something like that? What is the sound of silence? What is this speaking silence, this "thin voice of silence" as one commentator put it.
 3. When two people sit together in silence in love, this is what it was like for Elijah. The silence between him and God was love. God loved him and he loved God.
 4. Psalm 46:10 - Be still, and know that I am God.
 5. Zephaniah 1:7 - Be silent before the Sovereign Lord
 6. Habakkuk 2:20 - The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.
3. Our Prayer Habits
 1. Usually when we pray, we are talking to God. We are involved in what I will call "active" prayer - where we actively ask God for things or we may be talking to God about things going on in our lives. And if we were to think about praying all night long, we cannot imagine what we would pray for such a long period of time!
 2. But in our relationships with people, we don't talk to them all the time without asking for their input. We often sit quietly while they speak to us. So why should we think God would expect anything differently?
 4. Wordless Prayers from the Psalms
 1. The book of Psalms offers many examples of believers who go to God and are silent as they wait on him:
 2. Psalm 4:4
 3. Psalm 23:2
 4. Psalm 46:10
 5. Psalm 62:1, 5
 6. Psalm 131:1-2
 5. Waiting Prayers from the Psalms
 1. There are also prayers in the psalms where they talk of waiting on God. This leads to silence as well.
 2. Psalm 25:3, 5, 21
 3. Psalm 27:14
 4. Psalm 40:1
 5. Psalm 130:6
 6. Examples from Matthew 5
 1. In this first section of the Sermon on the Mount we hear Jesus warn six times, "You have heard that it was said...But I say to you." These warning

come and then he follows with a misinterpretation put into tradition and what God really wants as put forward in his Word.

2. This points to a listening problem. We often don't listen well if we are talking too much. The antidote to this is to be silent. Jesus is telling us that not only should we refocus our hearts on love, but also on being silent before God.
7. Where is the Silence?
 1. Today, silence has been overwhelmed by unrelenting noise. In 1920 a Nebraska inventor designed the first auto alarm. In 2004 New Yorkers proposed a bill to ban car alarms as a public nuisance. These indicate a relationship with noise - it has been growing exponentially over the last century.
 2. Today we do not do anything without noise. How many turn on their TV when they arrive home and then don't watch it - but want the noise in the background? How many use earbuds everywhere they go so that they are never without their own music? Sound is constant in our lives.
8. What Silence is not...
 1. The discipline of silence is one step toward controlling the noise in your life. But what do we mean by this discipline? Let's first say it is not a relaxation exercise. When we are talking about the discipline of silence this week, we are not asking you to go through the traditional relaxation exercise like your doctor might prescribe. You might or will relax - but that is only a side benefit, just as it is with prayer.
 2. Silence is not a supernatural event where we expect God to speak audibly to us. Throughout history, there have been moments when God has done this. We have several recorded in scripture. You can embrace silence while being engaged in something else, and not choosing to play music or the TV or some other noise machine.
 3. Silence is not an attempt to empty the mind. Christian meditation as spoken about in scripture is focused on filling ourselves and our mind with God. Eastern meditation is often about emptying your mind of all things. This is not our focus.
9. What Silence is...
 1. It is a means of resting in God and receiving Him. This means we must be still so he has the ability and moment to fill our hearts and minds.
 2. A metaphor may help - imagine you are a car with an engine and a radio. We often hear the radio, but we don't hear the engine - unless something is wrong. The engine is in the background, the radio is the noise. The engine signifies God in our lives - he is the

background one who is running our lives, and the radio is the noise of the world. We need to turn down the radio so we can hear God clearly.

10. How to do this...

1. There are many different ways to practice the discipline of silence. For us, we will work through these three and think through this lens for today. There are basically three types of silence that we will experiment with.
2. Simple Silence: During regular activities of the day, when you might listen to news or music or the TV, leave things silent. While driving to work, while doing the dishes, while working out, don't listen, but instead do it in silence and see what happens. Now don't be flippant with this time, but focus it on how God is present with you and you want to be present with him in those activities.
3. Single-minded Silence: Let's say there is a decision or a conflict or a difficult relationship in your life and you need to spend some time focused on it. This is what you want to do - spend time alone, in silence, with God, running that idea or concepts through your mind, praying, listening and thinking with God.
4. Contemplative Prayer: This is a serious version of silence focused over several minutes - no longer than 20 minutes, usually 10-20. The goal is not to hear from God, but to be present to him for those full minutes. This means sitting with eyes closed, comfortable, and letting go of all distracting thoughts. If you are interested in learning more about this, there will be instructions with your devotionals this week. It is not for everyone, because not everyone has the time.

11. Conclusion:

1. Psalm 62:1-7 (NRSV)
 - 1 For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation.
 - 2 He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall never be shaken.
 - 3 How long will you assail a person, will you batter your victim, all of you, as you would a leaning wall, a tottering fence?
 - 4 Their only plan is to bring down a person of prominence. They take pleasure in falsehood; they bless with their mouths, but inwardly they curse. Selah
 - 5 For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him.
 - 6 He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken.
 - 7 On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.

2. In this Psalms we hear David at a point of profound weakness in verses 3-4. But where is his rock? Who is his rock? God is his rock and he waits in silence for his rock. God is our rock just the same way. All we have to do is be silent and he will surround us more and make himself known.

Practice

1. I cannot emphasize enough that these practices are not to be done for God's approval - God already loves you as much as He will ever love you. These practices are for you! They will help you come to love God more, love life more, love others more, and love your possessions less.
2. This week you have four devotionals on the Practices Sheet. Each will take about 10 minutes. You can do them Monday through Thursday, or Wednesday through Saturday, or every other day. However you want to do them. They are offered to you for help in your walk. Next week, as we come to class let's talk about what we experienced this week with God.
3. We have been given a wonderful gift. We have four great opportunities to use this gift this week. Be sure to find the 10 minutes on four days this week to practice this marvelous gift. Start today and do it!