

Silence in Heaven

By the Rev. Derek Elphick

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"When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour."

Revelation 8:1

Silence is a fascinating phenomenon.

We wake up to it in the morning...

- but quite quickly noise is introduced into our day
- the humming, clicking, rumbling of appliances around the house
- the noise of traffic outside
- or machinery
- or horns, beeping
- sirens
- voices, shouting

Some of this noise and commotion is, of course, of our own making and some of it is generated by forces outside our control.

It's interesting - not everyone is comfortable with silence...

Some people...

- *crave* silence because they don't get enough of it (their day is full of noisy activity from sun-up to sun-down)
- *avoid* silence because they have too much of it already (they live alone or work by themselves shut up in an office all day)
- *fear* silence because they don't wish to be left alone with their thoughts (for them, silence is eerie, awkward - it puts them on edge)

Whatever the preference, we tend to compensate for the deficit by either creating a space for silence or by rushing to cover it up with our own "noise"

But silence can also be thrust upon us.

We witness something astonishing...

- the birth of a child or when a loved one takes their last breath - (silence descends on the room)
- standing on the rim of the Grand Canyon (hushed silence)
- standing at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier or at a War Memorial (a respectful silence)

Silence is thrust upon us when we experience something deeply moving

- an unexpected, kind gesture from someone

We can find ourselves "speechless" when someone says something awkward or embarrassing - we don't know what to say, so we say nothing.

Silence serves many, different purposes.

The Scriptures make a call for us to "keep silence"

"The Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before Him"
(Habakkuk 2:20)

In times of worship, prayer, reflection, it's important that our proprium, our natural wants and desires, be made quiet.

There's a time for the Lord to speak, and for us to quietly listen...

"Be still, and know that I am God..." (Psalm 46:10)

Now, obviously, there are times when we should **"speak up" and not be quiet.**

This is especially true when confronting evil and falsity, lies & deceptions
Evil hates the light and prefers to work in the dark

The Psalmist says, *"Our God shall come and NOT keep silent"* (Ps. 50:3)

In the Gospels we read how the Lord *"silenced the Sadducees"* (Mt. 22:34)

This is as it should be - truth, the Lord's truth, has the power to "silence" evil.

But today, we're considering the use of silence in our own spiritual work, in the work of regeneration.

And for that we turn back to the Book of Revelation.

The opening of the scroll with seven seals has a sequential order to it.

Each seal opened builds upon itself, revealing a new piece of information

- first the white, then red, then black and pale horses
- then the souls under the altar
- then the earthquake (Rev. 6).

The *Apocalypse Revealed* tells us that these visions of John describe the judgment against the Christian Church.

Specifically, it describes how church people throughout the millennia gradually misused the Word,
drawing false and damaging conclusions about the Lord and the life of religion.

This sets the stage for the opening of the last seal, the seventh
- *"silence in heaven"* (Rev. 8).

The half hour of silence in heaven represents
- **the "astonishment" of the angels (AR 389).**

- they were astonished that people on earth could twist the beautiful teachings of the Lord's Word in such a fashion that the truth
 - was lost
 - buried
 - forgotten

TWO THINGS HAD BEEN DESTROYED

1. A true understanding of God
2. A true understanding of how to live the life of religion

It made them speechless.

How was this possible?

What went wrong?

Why would people embrace such madness?

This type of reaction by the angels is mentioned several times...

To Swedenborg (due to his special role) - "What news from earth?"

"After the angel heard this, he was silent for a long time; he could not help feeling stunned. Eventually he broke his silence and said, "Can the Christian world have become so mad?" (TC 134).

Let's examine this idea of *astonishment* a little closer...

I think it's fair to say that we all have our own versions of "astonishment" here on earth.

Whether it be war, or politics, or economics, issues of justice - we can all point to situations that leave us speechless...

It seems as if the world has gone mad...

And from that elevated height, like the angels, we wonder...

How can it be this way?

What is going on?

What can be done to correct this?

Our "astonishment" comes from a sense that this isn't right!

And since we're talking about the *astonishment* of the angels, I think it's fair to say this type of astonishment is different from...

- anger and annoyance (because people aren't agreeing with us)
- indignation (that other people could be so stupid)

- self-righteous (that more people should be like us)

When we are made speechless, something DIFFERENT is going on...

We're being humbled

Not a time to be pointing fingers, looking for blame...

To "keep silence" corresponds to "mourning" and "grief" on account of seeing the harm that evil and falsity cause (AE 637:11).

John "wept much." Why? Grief. Lost our way. Who is worthy to open the seals?

Lamb could open the seals.

Lamb = INNOCENCE - will lead the way...

We experience similar moments of silence, of astonishment, in our own regeneration.

NOTE: It's only in the quiet sanctuary of silence that we gain clarity on what's causing the noise and commotion and unrest in our lives.

"While undergoing temptation we are amid the throng of evil spirits [who create disturbances]; but once they have been driven away or dispersed, a calm descends" (AC 842).

A new "disturbance" we are having to deal with in the world today is our unlimited access to information via social media and the internet.

Studies have made it quite clear that the brain can only process so much information at a time and yet we are being "fire-hosed" with information every day.

It is way more information that our brain can possibly synthesize.

This increase in the volume of information keeps on accelerating and is creating the sensation of the world speeding up.

And how does this affect us?

We are becoming more and more distracted. What piece of information do I pay attention to? It all seems equally important.

What's being lost is our FOCUS.

Studies are revealing an alarming trend.

Constantly being interrupted and switching tasks.
The average American worker is distracted roughly once every three minutes!

Our ability to FOCUS on one thing at a time for sustained periods of time is getting harder and harder to do.

Well, what does this have to do with our sermon?

Silence is a powerful tool to help us focus on what matters, truly matters in life.

To "keep" or "observe" silence is to invite the Lord into our mind.

We can use it as a way to collect our thoughts, to stop and think.

It calms our distracted, anxious mind - gives us a focus.

Like the angels, it leads to astonishment, shock, a new resolve.

The Lord "unseals" what's going on inside us...

1. He shows us the white horse - points out areas in our life where we are staying faithful and true.
2. He draws attention to the red and black horses - points out destructive thoughts and feelings inside us that need to be confronted.
3. He shows us the pale horse - attitudes and behaviors that are killing us
4. The souls under the altar - areas in our life where we must keep the faith, stay strong

5. Then there's an earthquake - the Lord is telling us now is the time for a change, a judgment

In the silence that follows, we experience astonishment...

"How could I have been so short-sighted?"

"Why didn't I see that before?"

"How could I have been so _____?"

The silence of heaven stirs us to make real, lasting changes.

This is how the Lord speaks to us;

he's not in the wind,
or the earthquake,
or fire

but He comes to us with a still, small voice (I Kings 19).

Amen.

Lessons: Revelation 5,6,8 (selections); AR 389; AC 842

