

“So He Opened Not His Mouth” (Steve Adams, Oct. 6, 2013)

Isaiah 53:7

“He was despised and afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth”

“On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame and I love that old cross where the dearest and best for a world of lost sinners was slain. O that old rugged cross so despised by the world has a wondrous attraction for me for the dear Lamb of God left His glory above to bear it to dark Calvary. In the old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine a wondrous beauty I see for t’was on that old cross Jesus suffered and died to pardon and sanctify me.”

You may think this message is more appropriate for Good Friday but as today is the first Sunday of the Month it means we will be taking Communion in a few minutes. Jesus said “Do this In Remembrance of Me” and so before we come to the table let’s take a few minutes to remember what He did in the hours before His crucifixion because “By His stripes we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:5)

Our Lord Jesus so took our place that Isaiah refers to us in this chapter as sheep: verse 6 “All we like sheep have gone astray” and He, Jesus, also is compared to a sheep: verse 7 “He was led as a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before its shearers is silent” It is wonderful how complete the exchange of positions between Christ and His people, so that He became what we are in order that we might become like Him. I certainly can understand how we might be referred to as sheep and He the Shepherd.

Though the symbol is very gracious this is not the only reference to Jesus as a lamb. Long before Isaiah’s day He was typified as the lamb of the Passover. Since then he has been proclaimed as the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” John 1:29 and even in His glory he is the Lamb upon the throne. Revelation 5:12 “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain”

So as we look at this picture let’s first consider our Lord’s patience under the figure of a sheep silent before its shearers. He was brought to the shearers so that He may be shorn of his comfort, of his honor, of his good name and shorn at last of life itself; but when under the shearers he was as silent a sheep. How patient was He before Pilate, and Herod, and Caiaphas, as well as when he hung on the cross. There is no record in scripture that He uttered any hint of impatience at the pain and shame which he received at the hands of these men. Not one word of anger. In Luke chapter 15 we read that “they bound Jesus, led Him away, and delivered Him to Pilate. Then Pilate asked Him “are you the King of the Jews?” He (Jesus) answered and said to him “It is as you say” And the chief priests accused Him of many things, but He answered nothing. Then Pilate asked Him again, saying “Do you answer nothing? See how many things they testify against you!” Herod was disappointed as he expected to see some miracle performed by Jesus as we read in Luke chapter 23:8-9 “ Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he

had desired for a long time to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him. And hoped to see some miracle done by Him. Then he questioned Him with many words, but He answered him nothing.” All that our Lord does say is in submissive tones much like a sheep bleating though infinitely more full of meaning. He does utter sentences like these: from John 18:37 when Jesus is again speaking to Pilate “For this cause was I born, and for this cause I have come into the world. That I should bear witness to the truth” and from Luke 23:34 “Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” Otherwise He is all patience and silence.

Next remember that Jesus was silent and “opened not His mouth” against any of His accusers. He did not respond to any of their claims. They slandered Him, but He said nothing; false witnesses arose, but He said nothing. You would’ve thought that He would have spoken when they spit in His face. He might have said “Why do you do this?” “For which of my works do you insult me?” But no He opened not his mouth. The time for attempting to reason with His accusers and dissuade them from making charges was over. When they hit Him in the face with the palms of their hands wouldn’t have been wonderful if He had at least said “Why do you hit me so?” But it is as though He hasn’t heard them at all. He brings no accusations to His Father. All He needed to do was lift His eyes toward Heaven and an army of angels would’ve chased away the crude soldiers. One flash of an angel wing and Herod had been eaten by worms, and Pilate died the death he well deserved for being an unjust judge. Calvary, the hill of the cross, might have become the mouth of a volcano to swallow up all of the multitude who stood there jesting and jeering at Him: but no, there was no display of power....or was there? There was so great a display of power over Himself that He restrained Omnipotence itself with a strength that can never be measured.

As He did not say a word against His adversaries, so too, He did not say a word against any one of us. He could’ve quoted from Exodus 4:25 where Zipporah said to Moses “Surely you are a husband of blood to me” as she saw her son bleeding and Jesus might have said to His church “Thou art a costly spouse to me, to bring me all this shame and shedding of blood” But He gave of himself liberally and opened the very fountain of his heart and did not scold His people. He had reckoned on the ultimate expenditure and therefore He endured the cross, despising the shame.

Many years ago Isaac Watts wrote in a hymn titled “How Condescending and How Kind”

“This was a compassion like a God,

That when the Saviour knew,

The price of pardon was his blood,

His pity ne’er withdrew

No doubt he looked across the ages; for that eye of his was not dim, even when bloodshot on the Cross he must have seen my indifference, our coldness of heart and unfaithfulness and He might have left for the record in my red-letter Bible “I’m suffering for those who are utterly unworthy of my regard; their love will be a miserable return for mine. Though I give my whole heart for

them, how lukewarm is their love for Me. I am sick of them, I am weary of them and it is woe to me that I should be laying down my life for them.” But there is not even a hint of such a feeling. No. John 13:1 tells us why – “Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.” He did not utter a syllable that sounded or looked like murmuring at His suffering on our behalf, or even regretting that He had begun the work.

Again, there was not a word against his adversaries, nor a word against you or me. Nor was there a word against his Father, or a complaint about discontent with the severity of the chastisement laid upon him for our sakes. You and I have murmured under comparatively light grief. We have dared to cry out against God as in Job 16:16, 17 - “My face is flushed from weeping and on my eyelids is the shadow of death Although no violence is in my hands And my prayer is pure.” In the Saviors mouth were no such complaints. It is impossible for me to understand how the Father pressed and bruised Him, yet there was no utterance of discontent or dejection. In Matthew 27:46 is an exclamation of astonished grief in “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” It is not, however, the voice of complaint. It shows manhood in weakness, but not manhood in revolt against the punishment.

Many are the Lamentations of Jeremiah, but few are the lamentations of Christ. Jesus wept, and sweat great drops of blood, but he never murmured or felt rebellion in his heart.

Look upon your Lord and Savior laying in passive resignation beneath the shearers as they take away everything that is dear to him and yet “He opened not his mouth.” I see our Lords complete submission. He gives himself up. There is no reservation about it. This is why He came. He stood there willing to suffer, to be spit upon, to be shamefully treated, and to die. In him was complete surrender. He was wholly given to do the Father’s will and to work out our redemption. Nothing in Him rose to plead for his freedom or to ask for an exemption. Not just a limb of his body or a portion of his mind but all of Him submitted to the divine will - The whole Christ gave up His whole being unto God that He might perfectly offer himself without spot for our redemption. Complete absorption in his work. The sheep lying there thinks no more of the pastures, yields itself up to the shearer. The only thought He had was the salvation of God’s elect. I wish I could arrive at this, to submit my whole spirit to God, to learn self-conquest and delivering conquered self entirely to God. Marvelous indeed was this submissiveness in our Lord’s case.

On this Communion Sunday let us admire and imitate Christ. This do in remembrance of me.

Let us say with a loud voice “Worthy is the lamb who was slain, To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and blessing!” And every creature which is in Heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: “Blessing and Honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb forever and ever!” Revelation 5:12, 13 Amen