

The silence of the cross

Part 1

Speaker	W. Moss
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[00:00:00] The words on the cross, the words that the Lord Jesus spoke when he was nailed to the cross of Calvary. This evening I want to speak about the words that were spoken to him and to which there was no reply. I want to speak about the silence of the cross. And it is with that in mind that I read these three scriptures to you. Isaiah 53 verses 3 to 7, Matthew 27 verses 33 to 49 and the first epistle of Peter chapter 2 verses 19 to 24. I think we saw this afternoon that there were messages for us, even today, in the blessed words that he spoke. Those seven expressions from the cross of Calvary. But I think there's also a message for us, messages for us, in his silence, as well as in his words.

[00:01:12] In Isaiah 53 we read he was oppressed, he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. Don't you think that's wonderful?

He had no reply. He had no reply to pint. When he was asked, was told to speak for himself, to answer the charges that were made against him. False charges. Charges which the Lord Jesus knew, of course, to be false. Charges which I think Pilate very strongly suspected were false. He was given the opportunity to answer for himself. Apostle Paul, when he was given that opportunity, says, I'm most glad to speak for myself, to answer for myself. [00:02:05] But the Lord was silent. Why? Why didn't he reply to Pilate? He was so right, so right, that one word would have saved him, I believe. One word would have saved him. I have the feeling that, as I say, Pilate knew they were chopped up charges. And that Pilate would have been glad, then, of the opportunity of telling the chief priests where they were to go from here. I believe one word would have saved him. But he didn't come down into the world to be saved, my friends. He came down to die. It wouldn't have done for him to speak that word that would have saved him. [00:03:07] He had come to die. That was his father's will. He hadn't come to avoid his father's will. He was so right that, I believe, at that moment, one word from him might have turned Pilate to stone. He had the power. Just imagine, Pilate, a little later on, daring to stand before purity itself, and wash his hands and say, I'm innocent of the blood of this just person.

Purity itself. And so, he opened up his mouth. Well, that's the fact. It's recorded for us in the Scripture.

[00:04:02] He was prophesied as long ago as Isaiah. But what's the message in that? Why was he silent? And how does that speak to us today?

Well, I think, for one thing, it speaks to us through the Apostle Peter, in his first epistle, the second chapter that we read together. You remember he said, Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps.

Nobody may say, I can't expect to be, however well I may want to, I can't expect to be perfect like him.

Does he really expect me to suffer in silence like that? I think if he calls us to suffer for his sake, then he does expect us to suffer in silence, as he did.

[00:05:05] Is that too much to ask? Oh, you say, flesh and blood is not human. Flesh and blood couldn't do it. No, flesh and blood couldn't do it. How right you are. But he could, and he did. And haven't we his power in us? Ought to have. And if we have his power, then we can do it, in his power.

We have him as an example. You don't suppose, do you, that Peter wrote these words with his tongue in his cheek? God forbid. You don't suppose Peter wrote these down and said to his scribe, of course they'll never be able to do it, mind you, but it looks nice on paper, doesn't it? Do you think so? No, never. The Holy Spirit of God doesn't work like that. He meant it. Leaving us an example that he should follow his steps.

[00:06:01] Well, we have the power to do that, and more for him, if he brings us to it. You see, once we were dead in sins.

Dead in trespasses and sins. But now, if we have come to know the Lord Jesus, our sins are forgiven. And we're not now dead in sins, we are dead to sin. Dead to sin. So that when temptation comes to sin, our reaction should be, no, can't do that, I'm dead.

When we are prompted by the Holy Spirit to do something for God, we are very much alive. We say yes at once. Dead to sin, but alive unto God. That's what it means, isn't it?

You remember the old story of the two little girls who were brought to know the Saviour. Two young girls. And they were asked to a dance. [00:07:07] Well now, whether it was right or wrong to dance is not my business here. But they felt it was wrong for them, as Christians. And so they wrote a little letter, a very polite little letter, saying, we are very sorry, we shall not be able to come to the dance, because you see, we died last night. That was the end of it. I don't know what the people who got it thought, but that was the fact of the matter. They took it literally. They were dead to what they felt for them to be sinned. And if we were to look at sin that way, how much simpler it would be. But it's a question of sin, I can't be undead. If it's a question of doing something for the Lord, why we are very much awake, very much alive. Dead to sin, alive to God. How simple it is, isn't it, when you look at it that way. You see, the eternal life that the Lord Jesus has so graciously, at the cost of His own life, given us. The eternal life He's given us is meant to be lived. [00:08:13] I think it's so important for us to realize, especially the younger ones, to realize that eternal life isn't merely a life that goes on and on forever and ever without stopping. It is, of course, that. But it isn't merely that. That's only one aspect of it. Eternal life is a different kind of life. It's divine kind of life. It's God's life that He is sharing with us. It's the sort of life that God had back in eternity, and will have in the future eternity. It's God's life that He's imparted to us. It's a thing we can't understand. Why He should want to do it, and how He could do it, but He's done it. It's a new kind of life, and He expects us to live the life in His way. To live His kind of life. So, we are to be dead to sin, and to live unto God, to righteousness.

[00:09:16] Well, that's not really my subject today, but it seems to come in without my meaning to. I really set out to speak to you about the silence of the cross. The silences of the Lord Jesus. And the first one I want to speak about is that bitter thought.

If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him.

That must have been a pretty strong temptation. If you come down from the cross, we will believe you.

What was He to do? Say, done, and come down? What He did was nothing. What He said was nothing.

[00:10:13] If He be the King of Israel, He said He was, all right, let Him prove it, and we will believe Him.

Let Him now come down from the cross. Haven't He made promises to Israel? Of course, the Old Testament is full of them. Wonderful, gracious promises of God to Israel. Promises of a coming kingdom. Promises of all sorts of wonderful things to come. But you see, this was the point, that those promises which God fully intends to keep, that there be no mistake about them.

Those promises could never have been kept, had the Lord Jesus come down from the cross. Do you realize that? [00:11:03] I think we sometimes tend to think of the work of the cross as being for us Gentiles, today, and blessed be His name, for it. But you see, it was every bit as necessary for Israel, for God's people, the Jews, every bit as necessary. They were sinners, we are sinners. And unless that question of sin were to be dealt with, God couldn't have kept His promises. That's why it was so essential that the Lord Jesus stayed there, and finished the work which His Father had given Him to do. Notice this, those people expected Him to keep those promises. They referred to the promises over and over again in their synagogue teaching, the promises of God to Israel. All the reformers convinced that God was, of course, going to keep His promises. Everybody expects God to keep His promises. [00:12:03] But you know, people, very often, who expect God to keep His promises without fail, don't keep their side of the bargain.

They don't seem to think it matters what they do. They can do what they like. God's got to keep His promise, of course, but I can do what I like. Is that how we react? People blame God if things go wrong. Why should this happen to me? Why should God allow that?

You call God a God of love if this happens to me? Why should it be me? In other words, why can't it be someone else? Why has it got to be me? They're blaming God. And yet, if you were to say, well now, what about yourself?

Suppose God were to start blaming you now, would you say? They don't seem to think about that. It's very convenient to forget that side of it, isn't it? [00:13:04] My responsibility to God. I demand that God keeps His promise to me, but I can do what I like as far as God is concerned. Well, it doesn't seem fair to me. Mind you, God has done a lot of things that wouldn't seem fair in a court of law, in some ways.

It wouldn't seem fair that one person should be guilty, another person should die. That wouldn't seem fair in a court of law, but God's done it. Oh, God has been very, very gracious and very loving, far

beyond our reserves. But you know, God is still righteous. I was going to say there are limits to God's patience. I begin sometimes to wonder whether there are limits, but there are limits. There is a limit beyond which God will not go. One must not encroach upon God's righteousness and God's holiness. There is no touching that. Nobody, nothing must touch that. And so, we have a responsibility to Him.

[00:14:10] And these Pharisees who were claiming God's promises, talking about the King of Israel, and demanding that He should do what they said, and come down from the cross, laying down their conditions to the Son of God, to the King of Israel. Now we begin to see why the Lord Jesus made no reply. There was just silence. He knew better than they did what was good for them.

He knew what would be the result of His coming down from the cross and listening to their factious demands. He knew what was better. And thank God He stayed there. Otherwise we shouldn't have been here tonight, believe me. But then they went on. They said, they went one further, or almost, than the King of Israel. They said, [00:15:04] if thou be the Son of God. Notice the word if. We heard it before. If He be the King of Israel. Now it's if thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. If. Do you see the doubt in their minds? Do you see the unbelief there? I don't think it was a question of, well it may be, or if it's true. I don't think it was that. I think if we don't believe a word of it. If it's true, then prove it. I think it was unbelief. And again, there was silence. And what a message in that silence. There's no response from God.

There's no response from the Lord Jesus to unbelief, to sheer unbelief. How can there be? How can there be a response from the one who looks right into our hearts, and sees unbelief there? No. He's not replying to things like that. Not the Son of God. Oh, if they'd only gone and looked back in their scriptures, [00:16:09] and read again of some of the Old Testament words, some of the men of God there, and the things they said about God, and the Son of God, and virtue, they would have been very careful not to be impudent in talking to the Son of God nailed to a cross like that.

Solomon, the wisest man who has ever lived, God promised there should not be ever a wiser man than Solomon.

A great and mighty king, God promised there should not be a richer man than Solomon, with the riches that God heaped upon him.

Do you remember what Solomon said? Will God, in very deed, dwell with man on the earth?

[00:17:06] Behold, heaven, and the heaven of heavens, cannot contain thee, how much less this house that I have built.

Feel Solomon's dedication to that wonderful temple which he had built, standing with his head bowed before God, bowed in awe, wonder, reverence, adoration, worship, but the great God who had blessed him so, can God, in very deed, come and dwell upon the earth amongst men? Will this house that I have built, by the heaven of heavens, can't contain him? That is how Solomon viewed God, in reverence, and awe, and worship.

You've got a few Tophnehetne Pharisees, if I may say so, daring to challenge the Son of God there upon the cross. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.

[00:18:05] David, Solomon's father, perhaps he was one of the men who has been nearest to God

throughout the whole of history.

From his boyhood out there on the hillside, alone with the stars, and with God, and his harp, and his songs. When he gave his instruction to Solomon, do you remember what he said? He said, this temple, my son Solomon, that you are going to build, has got to be exceedingly magnificent. We call that a portanto word these days, with two or three words rolled into one. It's a lovely word, I think. I roll it down my tongue. Exceedingly magnificent. There wasn't a word, I believe, I wouldn't be surprised if he made it up on the spot. Because I believe there wasn't a word by which he could describe what was due to God. The God he'd come to know and to love, and who'd been so good to him all throughout his life. [00:19:05] Exceedingly magnificent. Well, all the people today had some better idea of the greatness of God.

They wouldn't take his name in vain so lightly. They wouldn't dismiss the claims of the Lord Jesus so lightly, if they had some idea of his greatness. One day they will know. One day when the same Lord Jesus, the loving Saviour who took up the children in his arms and blessed them, the same loving Saviour will be seated on a throne as a judge. And they will stand before him. And he will challenge them, and they will be silent.

They will have nothing to say in defence of themselves. Then they will know who the Son of God is, when he sits there in judgment. Oh, they will know one day. [00:20:01] Oh, may God grant that many, many more may come to know today why he's a God of grace and love. Why he's willing and ready and able to bless. But then they went on.

They, I've no doubt, remember what the false witnesses had said about the temple. Do you remember? This deceiver said he'd be able to destroy this temple and he'd be able to build it again in three days. Of course, he spoke to them of the temple of his body, but they were so blind, they thought he meant Herod's temple. Forty and six years, they said, this was in building. And when you raise it up in three days. So they came to him at the cross and said, with in scorn, still misunderstanding, willingly ignorant. Thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days, save thyself.

It's all very well, they said, pulling down our 46 year temple and building it in three days. [00:21:05] What about saving yourself? You know, it's very near bless for me when you talk to the son of God like that. When you challenge and when you mock and when you are ironic and sarcastic to the son of God. Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up, he said.

And now they challenged him.

Thou that destroyest the temple, save thyself. What was his reply?

Silence.

I wonder what passed through the mind of the blessed Lord as they threw that challenge at him. He hardly dared to cry, but I have a feeling that what passed through his blessed mind was this. I have no need to reply.

[00:22:03] In three days they will know what I meant.

And they did.

In three days, as he promised, he was risen again from the dead. They did all they could to cover it up. They bribed the soldiers and they said, tell people that the disciples have stolen them away. I don't believe they believed it. It was political, a political thing for them to spread around, but I don't believe for a moment they thought he had been stolen away. I believe the Lord thought there was no need to reply to that. They will know soon enough. They will know in three days what I meant by raising it in three days. There are people today who don't believe in the resurrection or what they miss. What peace and joy they miss through not believing that the Lord Jesus is risen again. But you know the day is coming when they will believe in the resurrection. [00:23:04] Make no mistake about that. There are days coming when not only will they believe in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, but they will be aware of the fact that they have been raised again too. Those who have died in their sins will be raised to stand on the great white throne before the same Saviour as John. They will then know all about resurrection. They won't question it then. All the people will cease to question it today. Will believe it in their hearts today.

But then another thought, and this I think must have been one of the most heart-rending of them all. He trusted in God, they said.

Let him deliver him now, if he will have him. Another if, you notice. More unbelief. We don't believe we know anything about God. We don't believe God is listening to us. [00:24:02] Let him deliver him now, if he will have him. Let him deliver him now, if he will have him. And I believe the silence that followed that was the most heart-rending of them all. What could he have said? Or what couldn't he have said, had he had a mind to?

But he kept silence.

Why? I believe it was for this reason that he had cried to God.

And God had turned his face.

He had no answer to that.

Let him deliver him now, if he will have him. And God's face was turned. In a sense, for that moment it was true.

God had forsaken him because he was made sin. Oh, what a dreadful thought. [00:25:01] The Lord had no reply.

Oh, what must have been passing through his holy mind at that moment. Never before, I may say that without contradiction I think, never before had God failed to hear and failed to reply to a heart cry to him.

People have cried to him and not meant it. But people who have cried from the heart never before had he refused to listen and reply at once. Until then.

And I believe that's the only time in the whole history, before or since, when God has refused to listen to a genuine cry from the heart.

Oh now, what a difference it is.

Why, it hasn't got to be the Son of God now. It can be the poorest, meanest sinner. The most depraved sinner.

Who really turns in repentance and cries to God and God hears. And God replies at once. [00:26:01]
Who never again will God close his ears to a cry from the heart. Oh, praise God for that. But at that moment, he was silent.

The Lord knew there was no reply to that.

Then they went on again with another final thought. If thou be the Christ.

This was from the thief at his side. If thou, more unbelief you see, another if.

If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us.

And I have the feeling that what he had in his heart, that poor fellow, was save us. And incidentally, if you like, save yourself. Don't you think so?

I think he had his own beastly life in mind to be saved. What a thing to save. Forfeit it.

And he wanted it saved. No, there was no reply to that.

There was unbelief there. [00:27:01] It was if, if, if thou be the Christ. I don't believe it, but if you are. Oh, there's no reply to that.

Then at last he did open his mouth.

When? Ah, it came from the other side.

Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And at once he turned and his mouth opened. Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise. Why the difference?

Why did he listen to one and not to the other? Why did he respond to one and close his ear to the other? Why? Because there was repentance on that side. How do I know? Listen.

This man said, we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds.

Repentance is coming round to look at sin with God's eyes, from God's point of view.

[00:28:02] And at last this dying fiend had seen his own life from God's standpoint, and said we deserve every bit of it. God's right.

The other fellow was still looking from his own point of view, from one who was saved. He said, God's right.

We indeed justly.

And there was a response at once. There was true repentance. And God, the Lord Jesus, always replies to repentance.

He can endure all the taunts of the soldiers, all the mockery of the scribes and Pharisees, and the abuse of the thief at his side. He can endure all that in silence. But as soon as a cry came from the heart, from a repentant man, he replied at once.

Oh, what a wonderful thing to reply. I wonder if there's somebody here tonight. I can't go away tonight. Can't let you go away without saying, without saying, is there somebody here who has never yet cried to him in true repentance?

[00:29:01] It's got to be in repentance. He only listens to repentance in this. But then he replies at once. He's done all the work we had this afternoon. It is finished, he said. The work is all done. He has borne the punishment. And now he simply wants us to take advantage of it. Oh, praise God for everyone here who has taken advantage of that, turned to him in true repentance, and knows the joy and the peace of sin's forgiveness, peace with God, and a glorious future, eternity in front of us, with Christ in the glory.

Oh, may this be your happy hour tonight. Oh, God grant that no one may go from this hall tonight without Christ, and without joy and peace that comes with him, repeating this. May God grant that this silence of the Lord Jesus may speak to every one of us. Amen.