

When God

When God is Silent

Matthew 11:1-6

April 7, 2024

HDBC

A man arrived at a little league baseball game late and asked a boy in the dugout what the score was. The boy responded, “**18-0** —we’re behind.” “Boy,” said the spectator, “I’ll bet you’re discouraged.” “**Why should I be discouraged?**” replied the little boy. “**We haven’t even gotten up to bat yet!**”

There is an ancient legend about a man sentenced to death who obtained a reprieve by assuring the king he would teach the king’s horse to fly within the year—on the condition that if he didn’t succeed, he would be put to death at the end of the year. *Within a year, the man explained later, the king may die, or I may die, or the horse may die. Or, who knows? Maybe the horse will learn to fly.*

Hope is an amazing thing. Especially if it comes from a knowledge that **there is a God who hears and responds when we are in trouble**. But what happens when He does not seem to hear? What happens to hope when God is silent?

We’ve all been there. We have all experienced the sense that God is **not paying attention** when we need Him the most. There are **two things** that normally accompany those feelings.

First, you think you are the only one going through it. You come to church and everyone around you seems just fine. Pastor seems fine. **Then you go to small group class** and someone excitedly shares how God answered their prayer yesterday. ***I was in Walmart parking lot and it was crowded and an empty parking place came available just as you were approaching that area. Praise the Lord! God is Good.*** And you want to say, ***Really God?*** You are answering a prayer about a parking space and I’ve got this really big thing in my life and it seems like you have fallen asleep.

Second, you think it has to be your fault. You must have done something wrong. This is sometimes but not always true. **The entire story of Job** is

designed to demolish that faulty assumption. There is a N.T. example of a man who experienced the silence of God.

John, the cousin of Jesus had a prophetic ministry that reminded people of the great prophets of old; men like **Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Joel, Amos, Zechariah**. Men who courageously delivered messages from God. They were often insulted, sometimes injured and killed. John was like them.

He appeared in the wilderness of Judea after 400 years of silence from God. He was laser-focused & fearless in his call for repentance from sins. **He faithfully** prepared the nation for the coming of Jesus and willingly gave up his ministry to the ministry of Jesus. For him, it was never about building a personal legacy, but exalting Jesus. He faded from the scene, suffered in jail, seemingly forgotten, and was ultimately beheaded.

Before his death he experienced a dark season of doubt. The one who gave away his ministry because he pointed his followers to Jesus, came to a point in his own life where he was unsure . . . unsure if Jesus really was the savior.

What do you do with doubt? We have all experienced it. This is John's experience. It is there to encourage and inform you when it is your turn.

Read Matthew 11:1-6 (Consider three things)

1. The Situation (1-2a)

John is the one who first pointed people to Jesus. **John** challenged the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. He wasn't even afraid to challenge King Herod himself. That was why he was in jail.

This was not the King Herod who was the ruler at the time of Jesus' birth; this was his son, Herod Antipas, who turned out to be worse than his father. He seduced and later married his brother's wife. He condemned the king's behavior and was placed in prison. John had no idea of how long he would be there. He was not told his ultimate fate. That's what it is like when a tyrant is ruling the nation with almost unlimited power.

During those dark moments of lonely solitude, the enemy came and **planted seeds of doubt** in his mind. **Left there** to await his death, he began to have second thoughts about Jesus. That must have been a terrible thing to experience. To wonder if his life's message had been wrong. If the one to whom he had pointed others, was the wrong one. Had it all been for nothing? So, he wants answers.

2. The Doubts (2b-3)

Have you ever doubted the Bible, or God? Remind you of a few things.

First, you are not alone. Most believers have also doubted.

Second, doubt & disbelief are not the same things. In fact, doubt actually points to the presence of faith. The atheist does not doubt the existence of God, he simply does not believe. To doubt, one has to have an element of belief. You can only doubt that which you believe in. **I don't have doubts about whether the earth is flat. I simply don't believe it.**

Doubt can only come in a context of faith. Doubting is not unbelief, but rather ***the longing to be sure, the desire to have confidence in what we believe.*** **If you are doubting, honestly seek the truth with an open mind.**

In his questions, John exposes the doubt in his heart . . . this longing to be sure of what he believes. He wants to believe Jesus is the savior and does, but he needs confirmation, assurance, confidence. **How did he move from bold proclamation to sad doubts?**

Here are some factors that contributed to John's doubt. I see three.

1) Difficult Circumstances

He was experiencing confinement and isolation. John was cut off. He spent his ministry in the outdoors, but now was confined to a prison. He was called to preach, but now was made to be silent. He pointed people to Jesus, but now was unable to see Jesus, himself. **There were** things happening that he was not able to see and observe. No wonder he was lonely and discouraged. No wonder the doubts came. **Difficult circumstances** can cause us to question what we believe.

2) Confused Theology

It is possible that John's understanding of the mission of Jesus had gotten muddled. He knew the purpose of Jesus' mission. He clearly declared it during his public ministry. But he was also emersed in a culture that had a certain expectation of the Messiah. They believed he would be one who would drive out the despised Romans and establish the kingdom of God on earth.

While languishing in prison John must have wondered why more wasn't happening. What's he waiting for? **He said Christ would bring a baptism of fire.** He said the ax was already laid at the base of unfruitful trees. But at that moment one of those unfruitful trees was keeping him in jail.

Maybe his view of the mission and ministry of Jesus had become distorted. He expected Jesus to be a certain kind of Messiah and that was not happening. He knew better. He knew the real mission of Jesus. But a dark, difficult place our understanding can get muddled. **It happens to us, as well.** What did you expect when you got saved? **Did you expect all your problems to disappear? Marriage? Children? New Job? School?**

3) Unmet Expectations

When John was first imprisoned, I doubt he was concerned. His cousin is the Son of God. Jesus could **calm storms, heal the sick, raise the dead.** Herod would be no match for him. **He would have John's back.** After all they were on the same team. They were working together for the kingdom. **It was just a matter of time.**

Jesus could have busted John out at any time. After all, John had been nothing but faithful. He had courageously paved the way for Jesus. At the height of his popularity John pointed to Jesus and said **there he is. He is the one. Stop following me and start following him.** In fact, **He must increase and I must decrease.** *It is not about me. It's about Him.*

Jesus has the power. Not only is He the omnipotent Son of God, but he has the popularity of the people behind Him. He could demand John's release and Herod would have to do so. He could have gotten this done even without using divine power. Yet, nothing happened.

And so, day after day, week after week, month after month John wasted away in that prison. The entire time that he was wasting away, Jesus was thriving. He was healing the sick, raising the dead, feeding the hungry. His popularity was exploding. And, John was sitting in the dark, feeling forgotten and forsaken.

Where was God? Why no word? Maybe he had been wrong. If Jesus really was the son of God, why was he still in that prison? Jesus was out there doing all kinds of great things for strangers, but he wasn't doing anything for his own cousin. So, John was **feeling neglected, unloved, uncared for**.

Have you been there? Going through some kind of dark prison type of experience, wondering where God was, why He was silent? Here is a principle to remember.

Even when we don't hear Him or see Him, God is working. His silence does not mean His inactivity.

3. The Reassurance (4-6)

John did the best thing he could do. **He went to Jesus with his doubt**. He sent some friends. He knew the answer to his doubt was with Jesus. When they got to Jesus they shared John's question. Notice Jesus' response. Tell John all that you see. God is at work, even if John does not see it.

The blind see. The lame walk. Lives are changed. That is the proof that I am the Christ. That is what will drive away your doubts. So, He wanted John to notice the signs of his deity. **But there is more**. Jesus was not simply John what he was doing. He was encouraging John to take a look at God's word. For His words point back to Isaiah 29:18-19.

And on that day the deaf shall hear words of a book. And out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. The afflicted shall increase their gladness in the Lord, and the needy of mankind shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

Jesus was saying to John, I am the fulfillment of the Word of God. One of the best places to gain assurance during times of doubt is in the word of God. A healthy diet of the word of God will work wonders on your doubt and discouragement for it reveals Jesus for who He is.

Christians are not immune to doubt and discouragement. They come our way. **Amy Carmichael has reminded us; they are weapons of the enemy.** When they come you will find a compassionate Christ ready to reassure and to encourage. Look to Him. See what He is doing. Remember what He has done in your life.

I have read about a painting of an old burned-out mountain shack. All that remained was the chimney...the charred debris of what had been that family's home. In front of this destroyed home stood an old man with a small boy clutching a pair of patched overalls. It was evident that the child was crying.

Beneath the picture were the words which the artist felt the old man was speaking to the boy. They were simple words, yet they presented a profound theology and philosophy of life. ***Hush child, God ain't dead!***

That's what John needed to be reminded of. And, at times, that is what we need to be reminded of. Those words: that truth, can be like a life jacket that keeps us afloat when the surge of discouragement and doubting try to drown us.

Hush child, God's not dead!

Even in His silence, God sees, God knows, God loves, and God is working.

LORD'S SUPPER