

The Quiet Restraint Of The Lord

A Sermon by Rev. Donald L. Rose

"He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street" (Matt. 12:19, Isaiah 42:2).

These words are from the 12th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. They are quoting the prophecy of Isaiah and showing that it is about the Lord's ministry. The prophetic sayings in Isaiah give us images of the Lord's life in the world. For example, what do you picture when you hear this from Isaiah? "He was oppressed and He was 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." (Isaiah 53:7)

For every reader of the Word this presents one image, one facet of the Lord's ministry. Our focus today is on Isaiah 42 as it is quoted in Matthew 12. This pictures the Lord as quiet and restrained, one who does not cry out loudly, does not break even a bruised reed or quench a smoking flax. The chapter has the Lord saying, "I have held my peace a long time; I have been still and restrained Myself." (verse 14)

The Lord had the power to do many things that He did not do. He was quiet at times when we would expect Him to speak loudly. When He was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane He could have resisted and He did not. When His disciples resisted He said, "Do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. 26:53)

When, in the trials which followed, men accused Him with obvious lies, He did not even reply. They marveled that He was silent. "Do you answer nothing?" (Matt. 26:62) When they put Him on the cross, instead of resisting He said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." And while He was on the cross, people called out to Him, "Come down from the cross." What He had the power to do, He did not do. They said to Him, "You say You can destroy the temple and build it in three days ... Save yourself ... He cannot save Himself. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross and we will believe." (Matt 27:40-43)

There is a saying in the Spiritual Diary that when the Lord came into the world He "was able to compel men to receive His words and Himself but [yet] compelled no one." (SD 4422)

In Isaiah 53 it is said, "As a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth" (v. 7). In Isaiah 42 it is said that He is as one deaf and blind! (v. 19)

The prediction that the Lord would be as one blind and deaf implies that sometimes it would seem that He did not notice things (although we know that He did notice them). Note what the Writings say on this: "He is called 'blind' and 'deaf' because the Lord is as if He did not see and perceive the sins of men, for He leads men gently, bending and not breaking, thus leading away from evils and leading to good; therefore He does not chastise and punish like one who sees and perceives." (AE 409:2)

"As if He did not see." Remember when people were ready to stone a woman. They urged Him to say something, "But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear." (John 8:6) It is said they continued to ask Him and He simply said, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first," and then He stooped down and wrote on the ground. There followed a long silence. The Lord did not speak or take action, but during that silence what happened? One by one people who were convicted by their own consciences walked away. He wasn't confronting them. He wasn't even looking at them. But what occurred for each individual was significant.

They were not compelled.

When a woman washed his feet with her tears, a Pharisee said within Himself, "This man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner." (Luke 7:39) It seems that He did not know, that He did not notice. But the truth was that He knew all about both the woman and the Pharisee. He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven ... Go in peace." In the Lord's ministry sometimes it seemed that He withdrew to deserted places and did not want to be known. Indeed in Matthew 12, the focus of this sermon, it is said, "But when Jesus knew it, He

withdrew from there," and He warned people "not to make Him known that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet." The Writings say that the Lord "appears to withdraw from the evil, but the evil withdraw from Him, while He from love still leads them" (DP 330:2). Yes, there are times in our lives when He seems to withdraw from us, just as there are times when He seems not to see or hear. But this is an appearance.

In our own lives or in the lives of individuals we know, it sometimes appears as if the Lord is passive and unaware. And on the world scene there are happenings that make us almost want to say, "Doesn't the Lord see this going on?" Quoting the Writings again, "The Lord is as if He did not see." (AE 409:2)

Now, what truly was the nature of the Lord's life in the world? What the Writings reveal about this might be surprising to people who think of Jesus born into the world, having a quiet childhood, a passive and meek ministry, and then going quietly to His death. No. That is not the case.

There are people who point out that the Lord roughly cast the money changers out of the temple, and that He did that with so much spirit and zeal that the disciples remembered that it was prophesied that He would be consumed with zeal (see John 2:17, Psalm 69:9). What the Writings tell us is that the Lord's life in the world was one of combat and victory. It was not a combat with a handful of people in the land of Canaan. It was a combat with the most terrible forces of all the hells which threatened the life of the human race. The Writings tell us that He was exercising tremendous power. By His own power He reduced the whole of hell into order (see AC 9486). "He fought alone with all the hells and subjugated them," and is depicted as one "marching in the multitude of His strength, mighty to save." (AC 9715)

The Writings say that He had a burning love for the salvation of mankind. He was engaged in a blazing battle for mankind. And where do we find the hints of that? In Isaiah's prophecy. "I looked but there was no one to help, and I wondered that there was no one to uphold. Therefore My own arm brought salvation for Me; and My own fury, it sustained Me." (Isaiah 63:5) "His own arm brought salvation for Him;

and His own righteousness it sustained Him. For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head." (Isaiah 59:16, 17)

Do we have here two opposite things? the quietness and the seeming inaction on the one hand and the continual battle on the other? No, they are both true. The Lord was engaged in a Divine work. Remember that the Lord as a child said, "I must be about My Father's business," (Luke 2) and that He said to His disciples that He had food to eat that they knew nothing about. His food was to accomplish certain work (see John 4).

Now since He came into the world to give us freedom, He was most especially careful not to violate that freedom. Do you know of a passage that says that the angels who are with us are told that they must act gently with us? It is Arcana 5992. This is the passage which says that angels are with us, protecting us every moment. It reminds us of the saying that there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. It tells us that if the angels see in us a new hell opening, they endeavor to close it.

But the Lord enjoins them not to be violent with us but to lead us gently to preserve our freedom. They are enjoined not to break our loves, just as Isaiah prophesied: a bruised reed He will not break nor a smoking flax will He quench. On this the Writings say, "He neither shatters man's illusions nor stifles his desire." (AC 25) He does not break fallacies "but bends them to what is true and good" (Ibid.). There are times in life when the Lord seems so remote. People ignore Him or challenge Him by their attitude and behavior. Could He do anything about that? Could He force their attention and compel their allegiance? The Writings say that He could do that very easily. "Nothing would be easier for the Lord than to compel man to fear Him, to worship Him, and indeed as it were to love Him," but that is something the Lord will not do. (AC 2881) We are told that compelled worship is not worship and is not pleasing to the Lord (see AC 8588). But what is spontaneous is pleasing to the Lord. (TCR 495)

What is the Lord doing in our lives right now? There are times when we sense His power and His Providence. There are times when He speaks to us, as it were, with a loud voice. There are such

instances in the Gospel story. For example it is said that once Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let Him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37, 38).

So much of the time He treats us with what the Writings call "patience and tolerance" (Prophets and Psalms, Isaiah 42). We challenge Him and He is patient. We ignore Him and He is quiet. We think and act in shameful ways, and it is as if He withdraws into a desert place. But He does not withdraw. He is working with us even at those times when He seems so far away. As our lesson (AC 2796) said, we do not realize that our states are changing, and that He is directing our states.

Just as while He was on earth He was fighting for the salvation of the human race without anyone realizing it, He is fighting for us. He is acting with us. In fact He is "striving" with us even to the point of touching our freedom of choice without violating it. (TCR 74)

The Writings say that whether we know it or not He is "pressing to be received" (TCR 498), continually soliciting us to open the door. (see DP 119) How significant it is when we use that freedom that He is guarding so carefully, when we take initiatives against what is evil and selfish, when we take initiatives of love and new seeking of truth in our lives.

That is what we can do as He tells us in His Divine Human, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock."

Amen.

Lessons: Isaiah 53; Mark 15:1-11; AC 2796 and 9715 (portions)