

Matthew 26:57-68
Silent before the Sanhedrin
by Grover Gunn
pastor, Grace Presbyterian Church
Jackson, TN

Today as we prepare for the Lord's Supper, we are going to consider one of the many acts of humble obedience which led to our Lord's climatic suffering upon the cross. Today we are going to consider our Lord's silence before the accusations of the High Priest Caiaphas and the Jewish Sanhedrin. A part of the price Jesus paid for the legal right to speak up in our behalf when we are accused was to remain silent when He was accused. Have you ever thought about that? Let me say it again: a part of the price Jesus paid for the legal right to speak up in our behalf when we are accused was to remain silent when He was accused.

We read in 1 John 2:1, "And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." When Satan accuses us and brings charges against us, when Satan shouts to God that we are sinners, that we have broken His holy law, that we deserve God's judgmental wrath, Jesus speaks up for us. He is our Advocate, our legal defender before God's judgment seat. He doesn't deny these charges. He doesn't respond by claiming that we are not sinners and that we haven't broken God's holy law. His response is not that these transgressions never occurred but that their penalty has already been paid. Even as Jesus stretches forth His hands to argue our case, He displays the nail prints which prove His case. Through

His suffering, He paid the penalty which our sins deserve. God, in an act of both mercy and justice, accepts this substitutionary work accomplished for all who are one with Christ through faith.

Jesus is our Advocate with the Father when Satan accuses us with the true accusation that we have sinned. Again, in order to be our Advocate, Jesus had to remain silent when His adversaries accused Him with false accusations and charged Him with crimes He didn't commit.

We will examine Jesus' silence before the Sanhedrin under four points: protest, resignation, humility and patience. We will begin by looking at Jesus' silence as a **protest** to injustice.

When Jesus stood before the Sanhedrin late the night of His arrest, He did not receive a just trial. It was a sham, a show trial, a kangaroo court. Caiaphas the High Priest had decided weeks before that Jesus must die. The only purpose of this trial was to find some excuse for asking Pilate the Roman procurator to put Jesus to death. They needed for both themselves and Pilate some pretext with which to whitewash what they were determined to do. They needed some sort of veneer to give their actions an appearance of moral and legal justification.

We looked at the accusation when we last partook of the Lord's Supper. The Sanhedrin brought in many to bring false accusations against Jesus, but this did not work because the false accusations contradicted each other. Then some members of the court rose up and spoke against Jesus. They searched their

memories for something Jesus had said or done which they could in some way use against Him. They had to go back three years, back to Jesus' first visit to Jerusalem after the beginning of His public ministry, back to their first clash with the prophet from Galilee. They thought back to Jesus' first public display of Messianic authority in Jerusalem, back to the first time Jesus had cleansed the temple. Some of them had confronted Jesus and had challenged His authority to cleanse the temple. Jesus had answered them with a riddle. We read about this in the Gospel of John:

John 2:18-22

- 18 So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?"
- 19 Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."
- 20 Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?"
- 21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body.
- 22 Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

Now almost exactly three years later, some members of the Sanhedrin remembered these words of Jesus, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." They misquoted Jesus. They said that Jesus said, "I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days." That is not what Jesus said. Jesus didn't say, "I am able to destroy this temple." He used the second person imperative and said, "Destroy this temple." Jesus

didn't say He would destroy the temple; He challenged His enemies to do so. At this trial, they misquoted Jesus, and they also misinterpreted Him. He wasn't referring to Herod's temple. He was referring to the temple of His own body, and to His death and resurrection. These accusers misrepresented what Jesus said and twisted Jesus' words into a threat against the literal stone temple in Jerusalem. They hoped that Pilate would understand these words as an indication that Jesus was an anarchist who wanted to lead the people in a rampage of destruction against this national treasure which Herod had built. They also hoped that Pilate would understand these words as an indication that Jesus was also a seducer who was claiming magical powers to quickly rebuild such a structure. They distorted that statement and literalized it and wanted to use it in order to get Pilate to crucify Jesus.

After this accusation, Caiaphas arose and challenged Jesus to answer these charges. Jesus said nothing. He kept silent. Jesus could have pointed out that His words were both misquoted and misinterpreted. He hadn't threatening to tear down Herod's temple, and He didn't say He would rebuild Herod's temple in three days. Jesus could have spoken up and pointed out these errors and distortions, but He did not. He kept silent. This was a protest against the injustice of the proceedings. These men weren't seeking the truth. They weren't trying to determine if Jesus was innocent or guilty. They had already made up their minds that Jesus must die. Jesus was not going to participate in their farce.

Jesus' silence was an act of protest against the injustice of this trial, but it was more than that. It was also an act of **resignation**. Jesus was resigned to doing the will of the Father, and the will of the Father was that Jesus die as a sacrifice for sin. Jesus had settled this at Gethsemane when He had prayed, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done." We read in the book of Hebrews that "for the joy that was set before Him [Jesus] endured the cross, despising the shame." The joy that was set before Jesus was submitting to the will of the Father and dying a sacrificial death in order to redeem God's elect. As Paul says in Philippians, Jesus "humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."

Jesus was resigned to doing the will of the Father. This is why Jesus was at times silent in His trials before Caiaphas and Pilate, and this is why Jesus at times spoke up. If asked if He were the Messianic King of Israel, Jesus spoke up and witnessed the good confession. When Caiaphas said to Jesus, "I adjure You by the living God that You tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God," Jesus said, "It is as you said." When Pilate said to Jesus, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "It is as you say." When challenged to witness the good confession and to identify Himself as the Messiah and the Son of God, Jesus spoke up. When falsely accused, Jesus kept His peace and was silent. In both speaking and in silence, Jesus was being "obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." By speaking up and openly acknowledging His Messiahship, Jesus was cooperating with these efforts to put Him to death. By keeping silent when His accusers misrepresented His Messiahship and distorted His

words, He was refusing to do anything which might hinder or postpone His death. If He was to be condemned to death, the condemnation must be unjust, for He had done no wrong. He was holy, harmless and undefiled. So He was silent in the face of His accusers that He might fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 53:

7 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.

We have looked at Jesus' silence from the perspective of protest and resignation. Our third perspective is **humility**. Here we must examine the specific question which Caiaphas asked when Jesus chose to be silent. Caiaphas asked Jesus for an explanation of His words, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." We can understand the satisfaction that Jesus might have experienced through explaining the meaning of these words in specific detail to His accusers during His trial. He could have told them that He was referring to the temple of His body, and that it was God's decreed will and predestined purpose that they deliver Him up to the Romans to be crucified and put to death. He could have told them that on the third day after His death, God would raise Him up from the dead and exalt Him to His right hand and make Him whom they crucified both Lord and Christ. Jesus could have said these things and experienced the satisfaction implied in the colloquial proverb, "He who laughs last, laughs best," but He didn't. He was silent because He knew that saying these things to these people at this point in time was not God's will for Him. No, the proclamation of God's

sovereign purpose in His death and the victory of His resurrection was a message to be preached some 50 days later on the day of Pentecost, but it would not be appropriate here, not at this point in time. At this point in time, Jesus must suffer humiliation and wait patiently for the exaltation and vindication which is to come.

For Jesus to reveal to His accusers the details about His coming death and resurrection would have been to misuse the miracle of His resurrection. This is the sort of temptation which Satan had put before Christ in the wilderness. Satan had tempted Christ to use His powers for His personal comfort and exaltation. Turn stones into bread to satisfy your hunger, and jump off of temple steeples to impress the crowds. No, Jesus would not do that. Jesus performed miracles but always in the context of ministering to others and manifesting His power to save and doing the will of His heavenly Father. Jesus is not going to speak up about His coming resurrection here and use it to lessen His humiliation prematurely and to intimidate His accusers. No, all of Christ's miracles, including His resurrection, must be kept in the context of submitting to the Father and doing His will.

Satan had tempted the first Adam to claim a divine prerogative, the prerogative of deciding for himself what is good and what is evil. Satan had told the first Adam that by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, by doing this act of disobedience, he would be "like God." For the creature to try to be like God in this way is the essence of sin. It is a presumptuous, prideful transgression of the distinction between the Creator and the creature. The first Adam fell before this temptation and sinned.

The second Adam was fully divine as well as fully human. In His divinity, He had every right to every divine prerogative. Yet in His humanity, He set these rights aside and submitted to the will of the Father. The second Adam resisted Satan's temptation by always acting in humble submission. He did not fall before Satan's temptation that He exercise autonomous power, power exercised independent of God's plan and purpose. Jesus exercised power only in submission to God. He did not use the power of His coming resurrection miracle to alleviate the pain of His humiliation before His accusers. He drank the cup of suffering given to Him by the Father to the full; he drained it to the dregs.

We have looked at Jesus' silence from the perspective of protest, resignation and humility. Our fourth and last perspective is **patience**. Jesus must at this point be patient because God has an order in revealing things. God knows the end from the beginning, but He reveals things to people gradually and progressively. When Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," that was both a revelation and a riddle. No one fully understood what Jesus meant at the time, not even His disciples. Jesus would later teach His disciples in plain words about His coming death and resurrection, and the disciples even then could not understand what He was saying:

Mark 9:31-32

31 For He taught His disciples and said to them, "The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day."

32 But they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him.

Jesus revealed certain things to His disciples long before He revealed them to His enemies:

Matthew 11:25-26

25 At that time Jesus answered and said, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes.

26 “Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.”

Matthew 13:10-11

10 And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?”

11 He answered and said to them, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.”

Even if Jesus had mouthed the words to His enemies and told them about His upcoming resurrection, they would have never grasped the reality of the revelation due to their depravity.

1 Corinthians 2:7-8

7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory,
8 which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

By the time of Jesus' death, His enemies had somehow learned that Jesus had predicted that He would rise from the dead on the third day. They did not take this teaching seriously enough to believe it would literally happen or to submit to Jesus as the Lord of glory. They did take it seriously enough to take precautions against anyone's removing Jesus' body from His tomb. That is why the chief priests and Pharisees asked Pilate to secure Jesus' tomb and to set a guard over it.

I have one last reason why Jesus had to patiently wait in silence before His accusers. Jesus wasn't going to say anything which would have taken away from His accusers any of their moral responsibility for what they were doing. During His trial, it was God's will for Jesus to speak up regarding His accusers' moral responsibility and to be patiently silent about God's predetermined plans. At this point, Jesus was to speak God's revealed will but be patiently silent about God's secret will. Jesus was going to witness the good confession that He is the Messiah. By doing this, He was preaching God's revealed will to His accusers and telling them that their responsibility before God was to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah and to submit to Him. But then was not the time to explain to them God's secret will, God's predetermined plan that they destroy the temple of Jesus' body by delivering Him up to Pilate to be crucified. In the mystery of God's inscrutable ways, they had a genuine opportunity at that moment to submit to Jesus. God rightly holds them responsible for not doing so. Jesus was not to confuse matters by telling them at that point God's predetermined plan for them. As we try to grasp this point, we must cry out, "How unsearchable are God's judgments, and His ways past finding out."

During His trial, Jesus was at times silent when His accusers and judges pressed Him to speak. It was a loud silence which spoke volumes. It was a silent protest to the injustice. It was a silent expression of His passive obedience, His resignation to submit to the will of His Father. It was a silent expression of His active obedience in humility and patience.

As we prepare to take the Lord's Supper, we have considered Jesus' silence before His accusers. This silence was a part of His obedience which ultimately led to His death upon the cross. Jesus was silent then so that He could speak the words of salvation now and to eternity. Our response to His silence before His accusers should be to confess Him before men. If we confess Him before men and do so from the heart in faith, then the silent Jesus will speak up on our behalf and confess us before His heavenly Father.