

September 15, 2024

Deafening Silence

Psalm 83:1-3, 16-18

Have you ever gone through a time when you felt God was silent? A church member recently shared with me that she was frustrated at God's "inability to answer our prayers" for her sister-in-law, who was losing her final battle with cancer. Diligently, they had prayed, worshiped, been generous, faithful in Scripture reading, gracious in hospitality, and obedient in serving, but God was silent toward them. Terrible tragedies and acts of violence happen every minute and every day in the world. Where is God when our prayers are met with silence?

Faith assures us that God hears and answers every prayer. But when that answer is no or wait, we grow weary of the deafening silence we perceive is God's response. In those moments, we can resonate with the psalmist's plea for God not to be silent or sit still. The psalmist was clever in his approach: He made his demand and then suggested God was being plotted against and attacked (Psalm 83:2-3). This is a bit of sleight of hand. The writer was under siege, but he framed his argument as though God was the one who was in jeopardy.

But then the psalmist switched gears and pointed out that an intervention in this case would result in his enemies knowing God's name, surely something that would benefit God. This indicates that he was ready to turn over his need for retribution to God and let God have the last word. God commands us to love our enemies, and perhaps the psalmist was ready to let go of his anger, which pleases God.

We've studied many types of psalms in the past, and perhaps this is a new genre: Bait and Switch Psalms. We say to God, "Surely you want to answer my prayer as I have asked because it benefits you!" The good news is that God, indeed, is never silent. There is always a response, whether we accept it or not.

My friend eventually came around to this realization when her sister-in-law died. She recognized God's constant activity and response to the family's prayers as their beloved was ushered home on angel's wings. After all, because of Jesus' victory over it, death has no sting. May we, too, hear God speak to us in every silent response.

1. What can you do when it seems God is silent to your prayers?
2. Have you ever tried to bargain with God and frame your petition to God's advantage? What happened?
3. How can you draw closer to God in times of grief?

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