"When God Seems Silent"

As a parent I am so grateful for the inventors of Life360. If you are not familiar with this app it is basically a GPS tracking app for your friends and loved ones. At any time, I can open the app, see where my kids are, and even track how fast they are driving. The other day, Gabriel's phone died, and it shut off his location on the app. He works the third shift at his new work, so he doesn't get off of work until about 1 in the morning. I tried texting him and even calling. Finally, when I got through, he was aware of the situation and was able to correct it. Nothing is worse for a parent than not knowing where your kids are. When you are worried and it is followed by silence, it can be pretty intense and stressful. The same can be said when we are dealing with silence from the Lord.

Have you ever felt like God was silent? Sometimes we have a real need, and we bring it to God only to be met with silence. Have you ever been discouraged when you felt God wasn't speaking to you? If you ever felt this way you are not alone. Some of the most amazing men in the Bible faced the same stress. David cried out in Psalm 22 "My God why have You forsaken me? I cry out day and night and you do not answer me. I have no rest." The prophet Habakkuk cried out "O Yahweh how long shall I cry for help, and You will not hear?" Even John the Baptist sent a message to Jesus while in prison saying, "Are You the One or should we look for another?"

I was reading a book this past week from Dr. Larry Crabb and stumbled on a quote that really got me thinking. He said:

"God's restraint has a purpose. When He appears to be doing nothing, He is doing something we've not yet learned to value and therefore cannot see. Only in the agony of His absence, both in the real absence of certain blessings and in the felt absence of His Presence, will we relax our determined grasp of our empty selves enough to appreciate His purposes."
– Dr. Larry Crabb

This quote communicates a few things to me. The first is that in our humanity, we can fail to recognize what God is saying. Larry Crabb said, "We have not yet learned to value; therefore, we cannot see." Sometimes the silence we feel between God is really our inability to listen. The second is that although we may feel like God is silent, He is in fact always working. The final thing from this quote is that we have an opportunity in the middle of our confusion. The opportunity is to grow in faith, hope, and obedience.

The bad news is that life is always going to be tough. The good news, you can have joy in the middle of that toughness. Rather than growing depressed or cynical over life always being tough, what if we got tougher? What if we were so resilient in the faith that even in our suffering, we could have joy. Paul and Silas had joy and sang hymns at midnight in a dungeon after getting beat close to death. Hebrews 12 tells us Jesus had joy on the cross. The same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead lives in you and I. We have a choice in the silence. The choice is to become offended or to become more obedient.

I am going to reserve our main Scripture this morning more towards the end of the sermon. I want to begin with some encouragement on what we can do when we feel like God is silent.

What to do When God Seems Silent:

POINT #1 – <u>Check</u> Yourself.

A married couple had a quarrel and ended up giving each other the silent treatment. Two days into their mute argument, the man realized he needed his wife's help. In order to catch a flight to Chicago for a business meeting, he had to get up at 5 a.m.
Not wanting to be the first to break the silence, he wrote on a piece of paper, "Please wake me at 5 a.m." The next morning the man woke up only to discover his wife was already out of bed, it was 9 a.m., and his flight had long since departed. He was about to find his wife and demand an answer for her failings when he noticed a piece of paper by the bed. He read, "It's 5 a.m. Wake up."

Sometimes the issue is not that God is silent but that we refuse to be obedient. If you are struggling to hear God today, you may want to ask yourself a couple questions. Ask yourself if you have any unconfessed sin. Sin doesn't stop God from loving us, but it will affect how we love God. Ask yourself if you have a hardened heart. In Mark 6:5 Jesus could only heal a few people because of their unbelief. They were offended at Jesus because they saw Him as a normal man who was a carpenter. Jesus often told His disciples that they were failing because of their hard hearts. Sometimes we are offended at God or have a calloused heart that requires repentance. Watch this, sometimes the silence we face is a result of our striving and refusal to surrender. We understand this so easily in the natural. If a friend of ours is not speaking to us, one of the first thoughts may be, "Did I do something to offend them?" Yet when we do this with God, we only blame Him for being silent.

Sometimes God is "silent" not because He is refusing to speak, but because we are refusing to obey the last thing He said. Any parent in here knows that we will not do the next thing for our kids until they first finish the last task, we asked them to do. The apostle Paul said in Galatians 6:4 that we need to examine ourselves. The first step in navigating through silence is asking the honest question, "Am I the problem?"

POINT #2 – Be <u>OK</u> with Silence.

One thing I love about being married to Nikki for over 20 years is that we can sit in silence and still feel connected. On our road trips there are times when we don't say a word for hours, yet our hearts are still connected. Silence from God is not always a negative thing. Silence from God can mean many things. Silence from God could mean that He trusts you. I remember when I became the pastor here over five years ago my staff were so frustrated with me. They could not understand how I could be so "Hands off." I am not a micro-manager and if you are on my team, it means I trust you and I know you can do the job very well. But to some staff it felt like I didn't care. Sometimes when God is silent, it just means that He trusts you. You need to get to work rather than park in confusion. Just because God is silent doesn't mean He isn't working. Jesus said in John 5 that "My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I too am working." You can comfort yourself when you feel God is silent because you know He is always working.

Watch this: although He may be silent about your situation, He is actively working on the redemptive solution.

We need to renew our minds from a lie. The lie is that because God is "silent" it means we are not connected. Just because He isn't giving you new revelation, doesn't mean you cannot connect with Him. You see, this reveals true heart intentions. True worship is blessing God and ministering to Him without any desire for something in return. So, you can worship God and connect with Him and be intimate with Him even though He is not "speaking" to your situation. It can prove that you are truly after His face and not His hand. One final thing about the silent moments is that it is not punishment. God is not punishing you when He is silent. He is in fact giving you an opportunity. What is your opportunity? It is a change to grow in trust, faith, and obedience. We need to change the narrative from "Why are you so silent God?" to "Lord, what do you want me to learn?" This may be the time you need to look for the other ways God speaks. God is always speaking through His Word. If you feel God is silent, you better ramp up your study of the Word of God. It is His voice in written form. You may also want to speak to trusted Christian friends or family. Ask them to reveal some blind spots in your life.

POINT #3 – Don't stop your Christian <u>Disciplines.</u>

Why is this step so important? Because if you refuse to continue in your Christian disciplines when you feel God is silent, you may start to listen to the wrong source. The voice of the devil might start sounding like a good idea when you neglect the Word. Isn't it interesting that there are times when God seems like He is so silent, yet the enemy never shuts up. The devil is like a hyperactive child who loves fun facts…never stops talking. Not only do you need to fight to hear God when He seems silent, but you have to guard your heart amidst the noise of the enemy. Lies are loud, revelation is quiet.

If you have your Bibles, let's finally go to our main Scripture this morning found in Luke 1. God was silent for 4 centuries after the book of Malachi in the Old Testament. Yet when we see God finally speaking something new it was when John the Baptist was born. Let me read to you this account because you are going to notice something fascinating in this Scripture. Again, go with me to Luke chapter 1 beginning in verse 5:

5 In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years. 8 Now it happened that while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division,9 according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10 And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering. 11 And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. 12 Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him. 13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. 14 You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

– Luke 1:5-14 NASB1995

Can you imagine over four hundred years of silence from God? What is even more amazing is that in the silence Zacharius and Elizabeth were righteous, faithful, and obedient. They never stopped serving in the Temple and following the Lord. Can you imagine never hearing the Lord speak for your entire life? Just because God may not be speaking to you doesn't mean you have to stop speaking to God.

They say silence is golden – but is it possible that too much silence is not such a good thing? There's a room in the United States that's so quiet it becomes unbearable after a short time. The longest anyone has survived in the 'anechoic chamber' at Orfield Laboratories in South Minneapolis is just 45 minutes. It's 99.99 % sound absorbent and holds the Guinness World Record for the world's quietest place, but if you stay in there too long and you may start hallucinating.It has 3.3 foot-thick fiberglass acoustic wedges, double walls of insulated steel and 1-foot-thick concrete.

The company's founder and president, Steven Orfield said ~ 'We challenge people to sit in the chamber in the dark for 45 minutes. When it's quiet, ears will adapt. The quieter the room, the more things you hear. You'll hear your heart beating, sometimes you can hear your lungs, hear your stomach gurgling loudly. In the anechoic chamber, you become the sound.'
And this is a very disorientating experience. Mr. Orfield explained it's so disconcerting that sitting down is a must. The chamber is used by a number of manufacturers, which test how loud their products are. That's pretty interesting.

All that to say, if you have felt God has been silent…keep talking, don't give up.