

Silence in Heaven

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this evening for a short while, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture we read, the book of Revelation, chapter 8.

Revelation, chapter 8. And I just want us to look at the opening verse there, verse 1. Revelation, chapter 8, at verse 1.

We were told there, When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. If you have young children, or you work in a classroom, or you work with young children, or you spend your day surrounded by noise, you'll know what I mean when I say silence is golden.

Silence is golden. Apparently, the phrase originated in ancient Egypt, but it wasn't until 1831 that it first appeared on paper, after it had been penned by the 19th century historian and writer, Thomas Carlyle.

[1 : 20] As a family, we always travel to Keswick, as you know, every year for the Keswick Convention, and usually on the way down, we would see the big sign around Dumfriesshire area, near Ecclefechan, where Thomas Carlyle was born.

And Thomas Carlyle, he's said to be one of Britain's greatest philosophical thinkers. But the thing about Thomas Carlyle was that he was influenced by all the wrong people.

He was influenced by many of the atheistic Enlightenment thinkers, such as Voltaire, David Hume, and Edward Gibbon. And yet, despite all these ungodly influences in Thomas Carlyle's life, like many people in our community, Thomas Carlyle was someone who was brought up in a Christian home, with Christian parents, and taught the gospel from a young age.

And you know, I always find it fascinating when I find a name, and I want to search who this person was, and if they had a Christian heritage. And amazingly, Thomas Carlyle had a Christian heritage.

But when it came to the subject of silence, Thomas Carlyle, he has all these sayings about silence, such as, Silence is more eloquent than words.

[2 : 35] Speech is of time. Silence is of eternity. He says, Silence is as deep as eternity. Speech is as shallow as time.

Speech is great, but silence is greater. And even the phrase that we all know, Silence is golden, that's actually only half of the phrase. Because the full phrase is, Speech is silver, but silence is golden.

Speech is silver, but silence is golden. But you know, the thing is, when we come to this chapter, when the seventh seal was opened, we see that this silence in heaven really was golden.

It really was golden. And this evening, I just want us to linger for a few moments on verse 1 of chapter 8. And I want us to think about this golden silence, where there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

I want us to think about it, this verse, under two simple headings, the seal and the silence. The seal and the silence. So first of all, the seal.

[3 : 41] The seal. We're told there in verse 1, When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

Now as you know, and as we've said many times before, the book of Revelation, it's one long revelation. And we always have to keep that in mind. It's a revelation from Jesus Christ, about Jesus Christ, and it's all for the church of Jesus Christ.

And this revelation is important to us. It's important to the church of Jesus Christ, because as the church of Jesus Christ, in whatever century, we need to be reminded and reassured that in the midst of opposition and obstacles to the gospel, which are in every century, we are to remain focused.

We are to remain faithful to Jesus Christ. We're to remain fixated with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We're to stop looking inwards and keep on looking upwards.

We're to lift our eyes heavenward, so that we are always living life in the here and now with an eternal perspective. And that's the message which has been gradually and gloriously revealed to us throughout this revelation.

[4 : 55] Because as this apocalyptic narrative, as it's unveiled to us, it reveals to us Jesus Christ as the risen, ruling, and reigning king who is one day going to return.

And we've seen that throughout the book so far. Throughout chapters 1 to 3, that message was emphasized and explained to us through the letters to the seven churches in Asia.

Then in chapter 4, the scene shifted. And the scene shifted to this, it shifted heavenward, to this throne room scene in heaven, where John says that he sees a door standing open in heaven and a voice speaking to him saying, come up here.

Come up here and I will show you what must take place after this. And John says that once I was in the spirit and behold, a throne stood in heaven.

With one seated upon the throne. And around the throne, we're told, if we go through the narrative, around the throne, there were 24 thrones. And upon these 24 thrones were 24 elders.

[6 : 01] And these 24 elders, they're all clothed in white robes and they all have golden crowns upon their heads. Then before the throne, we're told there are four living creatures, each of them with six wings.

Then you go into chapter 5, the scene shifts again. And it focuses on the scroll that's in the right hand of him who is seated on the throne. Because the scroll is a sovereign scroll.

It contains this complete and comprehensive plan of God's eternal decrees for our world. But this sovereign scroll, as we know, it's not sealed with one or two or three, but seven seals.

Because seven is the number of perfection. Therefore, the only one to break the seven seals and open this sovereign scroll is the one who's perfect. And so within the scene, there's this angel asking the question, who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?

And John is weeping, but the throne room, those around the throne, they're worshipping because Jesus is revealed as the one who is sinless and spotless. He is the Lamb of God.

[7 : 10] He is worthy to open the scroll. And so heaven is rejoicing at this revelation. They're singing the new song and we're told that around this glorious throne in heaven, there's this picture of praise.

Thousands and thousands and myriads and myriads of angels are singing. But there's more because John says the whole of creation is singing. They're all singing praise to the one who is seated on the throne.

But as the revelation continues to be gradually and gloriously revealed, in chapter 6, we saw these seals being opened. The first four seals of the sovereign scroll, they revealed the first, the four horsemen of the apocalypse, which are not a scene of terror, but a scene of triumph.

Jesus is the King of Kings. He's riding forth victoriously on the white horse. The first seal that's opened, we see him with his bow in his hand and a crown upon his head and he has come out conquering and to conquer.

Jesus is out in front and he's leading the four horsemen of the apocalypse because they're the means by which the gospel will continue to gallop and sinners will come to salvation.

[8 : 25] They are the means by which King Jesus will build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. And we know that because the second seal revealed the red horse of persecution.

The third seal revealed the black horse of poverty. The fourth seal revealed the pale horse of death. The fifth seal revealed God's justice for Christians who were martyred for their faith and for their faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

As we read there in chapter 6, they were the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. And with that, the sixth seal revealed judgment day when all must stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account.

And at the end of chapter 6, we're told that on that day there will be many who hide themselves from the face of God who is seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. And then when we came to chapter 7, the previous chapter to chapter 8, we expected the seventh seal on the sovereign scroll to be opened straight away.

You would expect the natural progression is that from the sixth seal being opened that we would come to the seventh seal. But then there's this interlude, the interlude of verses 1 to 8, where John sees the church militant.

[9 : 45] That's the church on earth fighting the good fight of faith. That's us. But what John realizes is that as the church militant, we don't stand firm in our own strength.

We stand firm because we're sealed with the seal of the living God. And that seal, as we've said before, it's a seal of sovereignty, security, and surety. It's a seal that has been set upon the foreheads of the 144,000.

It's a symbolic number of all of God's spirit-filled people. All of God's sealed people. And they're all sealed because not one of them will be lost.

Not one of them will be lost. Therefore, the seal of the living God is that guarantee. The guarantee that at their death, the church militant, that's us, the church militant, will be made perfect in holiness.

At our death, we will be made perfect in holiness and immediately pass into glory. And that's our great hope. That's our assurance as the church militant, as those who are sealed with the seal of the living God.

[10 : 55] Because through the precious blood of Christ, the souls of believers, as we know our catechism to be, the souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness.

They do immediately pass into glory. Their bodies still be united to Christ to rest in their graves until the resurrection. Which is why, as chapter 7 reveals more and more of this revelation.

John no longer sees the church militant fighting the good fight of faith. In the second half, John sees the church triumphant as they stand before this throne in heaven.

And what John sees and what John says about the church triumphant is that they are an elect multitude which no man can number.

But God has numbered them and God has named them. And God has gathered them from every nation, from every tribe, from every people group and from every language on earth.

[11 : 53] And then we're told, as we read it earlier, one of the 24 elders asks about this, about the identity of this innumerable multitude. Who are these? Who are they? Who are these clothed in white robes?

Where have they come from? And the answer is given, these are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They've washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Verse 15, Therefore, they are before the throne of God. They serve him day and night in his temple. And he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more.

The sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd. He will guide them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

And you know, you follow the narrative. You follow the scene being unveiled more and more and more. And by the time we reach this point, you are to realise, or we are to realise, we are a blessed people.

[13 : 00] We should come to the end of chapter 7 and realise, we are a blessed people. We are promised that in this world we will encounter and experience much tribulation.

There will be struggles with sin, struggles with sickness, struggles with suffering, struggles with sorrow. There will be grief, there will be groaning, there will be heartache and there will be heartbreak.

There will be conflict, there will be contention, there will be opposition, there will be obstacles. It will be through much tribulation that we enter the kingdom of heaven. But we are a blessed people.

You should reach the end of chapter 7 and say, I am blessed. Because although we have much tribulation in this world, we will have triumph in the next.

Although we will have much tribulation in this world, we will have triumph in the next. We are a blessed people because as J.C. Ryle says, we will have grace by the way and glory in the end.

[14 : 02] So tonight, we have grace by the way, but we are promised glory in the end. We are a blessed people. We are a blessed people who now, as Paul says, we now only see through a glass darkly.

But one day, and this is what it's all about, one day, we will see Jesus face to face. And when we see him, says John, the other apostle, we will be like him because we see him as he is.

Our great hope and our great assurance as a blessed people is that when we see him, the one who loved us and gave himself for us, when we see him, we will also see others.

And we'll see those who went before us. We'll see all these Old Testament saints that we read of. We'll see Jeremiah. We'll see Moses. We'll see Elijah. We'll see Hannah.

We'll see Ruth. We'll see Naomi. We'll see all these Old Testament saints. We'll see all the New Testament disciples. We'll see Peter and James and John. We'll see Stephen who was stoned.

[15 : 05] We'll see Matthew, the tax collector. We'll see all these people. We'll see men from the early church, those from the medieval church. We'll see those from the Reformation church. We'll see John Knox, Martin Luther, all these famous people we know about and have read about, the Puritans, the Covenanters, the Fathers of the Free Church, Thomas Chalmers, Horatius Boner, all these men that we've read of.

More than that, we'll see those from our own community. And that's what always gets me. We'll see those from our own community, those from our own family, those whom we loved and those whom we lost, those who were godly examples to us when we were little children, those who spoke to us about our soul, those who challenged us when we were wayward, those who confronted us with the gospel, when we were out in the far country, those who prayed for us and pleaded for us that we would be saved, but they never saw it.

My friend, we are a blessed people. We should come to the end of chapter 7 and see that we are a blessed people because our salvation assures us that one day we will see them. We will not only see Jesus, but we will see them.

And because we're a blessed people, we should be singing wholeheartedly as we were singing earlier in Psalm 89, O greatly blessed, the people are, the joyful sound that know, in brightness of thy face, O Lord, they ever on shall go.

We are a blessed people and we should always have that in mind. That's why we should stop looking inward and keep looking upward.

[16 : 49] But you know, the reason we went through the whole narrative, and I hate repeating myself, but the reason we went through this whole apocalyptic narrative and see that it's unveiling all the way to the end of chapter 7, because I want us to see that it's continuously revealing Jesus Christ as the risen, ruling, and reigning king who's going to return.

But what we should notice as we go through the narrative is that as each seal upon the sovereign scroll is being opened, more and more singers are joining the choir.

I don't know if you noticed that. As each seal upon the sovereign scroll is being opened, as you go through the narrative, more and more singers are joining the choir.

Chapter 4 begins with the 24 elders sitting on their 24 thrones, clothed in white robes with their golden crowns. They're singing. Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.

Then more join the choir. The four living creatures, they join in singing, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come. You go into chapter 5, then we're told that there's thousands and thousands and myriads and myriads of angels.

[18 : 17] They begin singing and they're singing, worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing. Then the creation adds its voice to the choir.

They sing, to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever. and in the last voice we're told there at the end of chapter 7, just before we reach chapter 8, we're told that the last voice to add its voice to the singing that's going on in heaven is this innumerable multitude that God has named and God has numbered and we're told they're from every tribe, every nation, every people, every language and they're all crying out.

They're all singing out. They're all directing their praise to one place. They're all singing with one voice and as each seal is being opened and broken from this scroll, in my mind there are more and more singers joining the choir and all the time the choir is getting bigger and bigger and the singing is getting louder and louder and their volume is rising higher and higher and higher and they're all singing.

They're all singing salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb and they're repeating their singing salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb but as soon verse 1 of chapter 8 when the Lamb opened the seventh seal there was silence.

[20 : 01] silence in heaven for half an hour. The volume was rising and rising and rising until the seal was opened and as soon as the seventh seal was opened there was silence.

There was silence. When the Lamb opened the seventh seal there was silence in heaven for half an hour. And you know as this apocalyptic narrative is unveiled John has showed us the church militant he has shown us the church triumphant and now he shows us the church silent.

Silent in heaven. And when the seal is opened this silence was golden. this silence is golden.

That's what I want us to think about secondly. The silence. The seal and then the silence. When the Lamb opened the seventh seal there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

Now I don't know about you but the first question that comes to my mind when reading this opening verse of chapter 8 is if there is no time in heaven because heaven is eternal then how did John know that heaven was silent for half an hour?

[21 : 37] If there is no time in heaven because heaven is eternal how did John know that heaven was silent for half an hour? Of course the answer is we don't know. But it's the only occasion in the Bible where half an hour is mentioned.

And when you think about it half an hour of silence it's a long time. If I was to stand here silently say nothing for half an hour from 8 o'clock till half past 8 if I stood here silently you'd probably find the time long.

Or maybe you'd be thankful and you'd think well my silence is golden. But you know when this seal was opened this silence was golden and this silence in heaven was significant.

The silence in heaven was significant. Gregory Beale he's a professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology at RTS in America.

In fact Gregory Beale's PhD was on the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament. And he's thought to be one of the most said to be one of the most influential New Testament scholars in our generation.

[22 : 52] And I give you all that background because of what I'm going to say next. Because when commenting on this verse Gregory Beale he wrote the key significance of the silence in heaven lies in the Old Testament because it's associated with divine judgment.

The key to the significance of the silence in heaven lies in the Old Testament because it's associated with divine judgment. That's why we sang in Psalm 31.

We sang there verse 18 but let the wicked suffer shame and silent in the grave abide suppress the lying lips which speak against the just with haughty pride.

The Old Testament prophet Habakkuk he proclaimed the Lord is in his holy temple that all the earth keeps silence before him.

Then Zechariah he prophesied about the coming judgment of the Lord and he said be silent be silent all flesh before the Lord for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling.

[24 : 05] And so what we're to understand from all these Old Testament texts is that when the seventh and final seal upon the sovereign scroll is opened when it's opened by the Lamb in the midst of the throne the seventh seal reveals God's holy majesty.

That's why the silence is golden but heaven responds with a profound silence. The seventh seal reveals God's holy majesty and heaven responds with a profound silence.

And you know half an hour of silence you'd almost think it's an eerie silence because it's as one commentator described it it's the calm and the silence before the storm of judgment.

It's the calm and the silence before the storm of God's judgment. Joel Beakey in his commentary he writes the seven seals climax in thunderous silence.

The cries of the martyrs for divine justice that's chapter six the roaring earthquake and the dissolution of the world the screams of the wicked as Christ's wrath falls upon them all of it gives way to an awe-filled silence as every mouth is quiet and even the saints and the angels stand amazed at the glory of the Lord.

[25 : 36] And you know there are times in life when we often say silence is golden. Solomon reminds us that he reminds us in his sermon Ecclesiastes he says to everything there's a season a time for every purpose under heaven there's a time to be born and a time to die there's a time to speak says Solomon and there's a time to keep silent.

And sometimes we're stunned into silence by the beauty of creation other times we're stunned into silence by the bereavements we encounter death always leaves us with a shocked silence a sorrowing silence and in those moments of sorrow and sadness and separation our Bible says to us that it's good for us to wait in silence before the Lord of course the world wants to drown out the silence that's why they always want noise they always want mumbling they always want music just so they don't have to think about the fragility of life and the finality of death but you know what God says to us be still be still and know that I am God and you look at this verse and the whole of heaven is being told to be still and know that I am God and that's what this seventh seal and its silence reveals to us it's showing all in heaven who God really is and they're all saying they're all being told be still and know that I am God the church militant the church triumphant suddenly becomes the church silent silent in the presence of almighty

God you know when this world comes to its conclusion there will be a stunned silence at the last judgment a stunned silence because everyone will be still and know that he is God and as this revelation continues to be unveiled we'll see it as we keep going through it it will reveal seven angels and seven trumpets who will all announce the last judgment that's the direction that this revelation is going it's revealing what is going to take place after this as John says so when the lamb opened the seventh seal there was silence in heaven for about half an hour well may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray O Lord our gracious God help us we pray to be still and know that thou art

God a God who is far above and beyond our asking or even our thinking that thou art a God who is holy holy holy a God who is infinite eternal and unchangeable one who created all things that man's eye can see and even all things that man's eye cannot see and that on the last day when the trumpet sounds the world will stand still and worship thee as our great God and the lamb who is in the midst of the throne that every knee will bow every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father Lord help us we pray as thy people to keep looking upward to know that in this world we have much tribulation but yet Lord we have that great hope that great assurance that there will be tribulation in this world but triumph in the next that when we see him we shall be like him and see him even as he is

Lord help us then to keep pressing on to keep living lives worthy of the gospel to keep living epistles seen and read of people that we would be those who witness to Jesus and live lives for his glory go before us Lord we pray forgive us we ask for our waywardness and our often when our minds are caught up with the things on earth but help us Lord to set our affection on things above where Christ is seated ever living to make intercession for us do us good then we pray go before us cleanse us we ask for Jesus sake Amen we're going to bring our service to a conclusion this evening we're going to sing the words of Psalm 46 Psalm 46 we're singing from the beginning the first two stanzas first three verses

[30 : 40] Psalm 46 verses 1 to 3 and 10 and 11 so we're singing the beginning of the psalm and also the end of the psalm psalm that reminds us that when our world is turned upside down God is our refuge and our strength God is our refuge and our strength and strays suppressant aid therefore although the earth remove we will not be afraid though hills amidst the seas be cast though waters roaring make and troubled be ye though the hills by swelling seas to shake be still and know that I am God and you know I love those words be still literally means kneel kneel and know that I am God which gives a whole new meaning to it it's all about surrender and submission be still and know that I am God among the heathen I will be exalted I on earth will be exalted high our God who is the Lord of hosts is still upon our side the God of Jacob our refuge forever will abide so we sing these verses of Psalm 46 verses 1 to 3 and then verses 10 and 11 to God's praise

God is our refuge and our strength in straits of present date therefore although the earth removed we will not be afraid though hills are blessed the seas be passed though waters rolling may but rather be near all the hills by swelling seas to shame be still and know that

I am God among the heathen I will be exalted I honor will be exalted I will be exalted our God who is the Lord of hosts is still upon our side the God of Jacob our refuge forever will abide the grace of the

Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever more Amen