

66-08-01-The Silence of Anticipation

quietness, prayerfulness, attentiveness, focus, meditation, expectancy

Rev 8:1-5

Our undivided attention in worship invites God's personal intervention.

INTRODUCTION: (Text as the Scripture Reading)

–There's nothing holy about *silence* itself, yet God says in **Psa 46:10a**,

“Be **still**, and know that I am God.” There's nothing *unholy* about *noise* itself, because **Psa 100:1** (ESV) says, “Make a joyful **noise** to the LORD, all the earth!”

–*Holy silence* and *joyful noise* are both necessary in our life of worship, but how and when to practice them depends on *spiritual awareness*.

–Humans can fall into lazy worship habits. *Spiritual sensitivity* requires attentive effort, but **HOM.idea**. To experience God's presence in our *worship*, I believe we must begin with the *silence of anticipation* (title).

I. Silence Acknowledges God's Holy Presence– v.1, *When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.*

- A. *Worshippers* must be sensitive to God's activity (Not just “*What would Jesus do?*” but “*What's He doing at this very moment?*”)
- B. When God gathers us as a body of believers, we are His special *temple*. This gives deeper meaning to the OT verse **Hab 2:20**, But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth **be silent** before him.
- C. So, v.1's “*silence in heaven*” exemplifies our own worshipful response “on earth as it is in heaven.” (And *silence* helps us in other areas):
 1. By it, we show the value of God's activity compared to our own.
 2. It encourages scattered thinking to become focused attention.
 3. It facilitates an attitude of anticipation: “*What's next, Lord?*”

TRANS: The only reason a *meeting place* is holy is that a *holy meeting* is taking place in it. We are here to focus on God's plan of activity– v.2, *And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets*. Trumpets are loud. There's certainly going to be some holy noise happening! But bringing into our meeting the noise of worldly cares can distract us from spiritual attentiveness. Corporate worship is a privileged discipline that separates us as a *holy* body to focus on Him Who said “where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” *Our silence* enhances our readiness for meeting Him and our reverence in greeting Him. The next verses show that...

II. Silence Should Facilitate Our Prayerfulness— v.3-4, *Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand.*

- A. Jesus was deeply upset at the money changers in the temple area—**Mat 21:1**, “It is written,” he said to them, “My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it a ‘den of robbers.’” (When worldly thoughts displace an attitude of prayer during a time set aside for worship, our preoccupations can rob God of the honor we owe to Him.)
- B. We can’t see angels, and we can’t see our prayers, yet this verse says they’re tangibly offered before God by an angel’s hand. (Prayers have concrete spiritual reality! The situations we pray about are of temporary concern, but prayers have lasting impact in heaven.)
- C. Personal prayers are important. God listens to each of them. But this verse is about our prayers as a body, our corporate prayers: the prayers of all the saints. (Each time we meet and pray as a body, we contribute another portion to the prayers of all the saints.)

TRANS: We may underestimate the power and effect of our prayers, because of weak faith. Yet despite of being called to “walk by faith, not by sight,” here we’re given a vision of what our prayers truly look like. Trials, difficulties, hardships, pain, injustice, discouragement: these stare us in the face and shout in our minds. But holy silence—broken only by the prayers, praises or preaching of God’s Word—brings our hearts into the waiting presence of the One who rules over and can overrule all earthly situations and circumstances. That....

III. Silence Anticipates God’s Unfolding Plan— v.5, *Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.*

- A. Remember the context of this passage! John’s Revelation is the last book of the Bible, and it’s about the “eskaton” [lit., “last things”].
1. God has been patient with human rebellion, inviting sinners to turn from their selfishness and evil and to be saved by His Son.
 2. His offer of salvation means there’s something to be saved from, and that something is the hellish destiny of final unrepentance.
- B. As God begins His judgment, these peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake parallel the description in Exodus, when

God spoke forth His Word, which He meant to be obeyed:

1. **Exo 19:18-19**, Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in **fire**. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the **whole mountain trembled** violently, and the **sound of the trumpet** grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him. (God has quietly awaited humanity’s response to His Word, but a wayward world has spurned and rejected it.)
2. In contrast, our response of focused attention, worshipful prayer, and faithful obedience is the prelude of God’s breaking the silence in heaven with the fearful, fiery noise of His final judgment on sin.

CONCLUSION:

—We practice a **meditational prelude** as we begin our worship here. It prepares us by quieting our minds from various distractions and helps us focus on God’s presence and His activity in our midst. During our **sharing time**, these distractions—seen in the light of God’s care and concern—can be shared as prayer requests, along with our praises or testimonies or other words of encouragement. OR we may find them not so distracting after all: our silence having exposed their triviality. —**At church**, we should definitely “make a joyful noise unto the Lord” and share our prayer needs and testimonies, but let’s make it a spiritual habit to start our corporate worship by silent attentiveness and anticipation, because **our undivided attention in worship invites God’s personal intervention**.

Revelation 8:1-5 (NIV)

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