

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

Vol. XXX

April 5, 2020

No. 14

Times for Silence

(Jerry Fite)

There is “*a time to keep silence and a time to speak,*” Solomon tells us (*Ecclesiastes 3:7*). We spend a lot of time speaking and should make sure our speech is appropriate and timely. A word of “*joy*” given as an answer: “*how good it is*” (*Proverbs 15:23*). A word “*fitly spoken*” has a beauty “*like apples of gold in a network of silver*” (*Proverbs 25:11*). But how often do we think about the times we should be silent?

The times of silence in the Scripture are not the joyful and pleasant times we like to see. But they are instructional. Viewing the results of God’s judgment upon Jerusalem, God’s people are silenced. No more doubts about God’s warnings. Nor more declaring peace when there is no peace. Harsh reality is right before the eyes of the leaders. “*The elders of the daughter of Zion sit upon the ground, they keep silence*” (*Lamentations 2:10*). But bearing the yoke of God’s chastisement in silence is also good. “*It is good that a man should hope and quietly wait for the salvation of Jehovah. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone and keep silence, because he hath laid it upon him. Let him put his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope*” (*Lamentations 3:26-29*).

In silence, David felt the guilt of sin. “*When I kept silence, my bones wasted away through my groaning all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture was changed as with the drought of summer*” (*Psalms 32:3-4*). No one else is to blame. I’m the one. I have sinned. God’s hand of righteousness weighs heavy upon the conscience and leads to the next step of confessing sins through repentance, enjoying the blessings of forgiveness.

Silence is appropriate for those times of deep sorrow over one’s physical condition. While Job sits among the ashes feeling the pain of boils all over his body, his three friends sat down with him and “*none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was great*” (*Job 2:13*). Looking upon the grieving face and silent mouth, we often feel that we need to say something. It is too quiet. So, we break the silence with words which upon reflection create more confusion and increased sorrow. If Job’s friends were to respond with “*all things work together for good*” as many do today, they would not have helped Job at this moment, and would have increased his uncertainty of God’s justice. What things? Are these boils punishment from God

for my sin? What good are they to me? Job’s friends did the appropriate thing: they sat with him, not leaving him by himself in his grief, and kept quiet.

There is also a practical side of silence. It is difficult to reflect on what is being said when we are talking. The multitude in Jerusalem did a wise thing after Peter emphasized that salvation was by grace apart from the Law of Moses. They could have started talking and trying to refute the words of Peter, but they “*kept silence,*” and did not miss Paul and Barnabas’ input of reflecting upon God’s miracles which confirmed Peter’s remarks (*Acts 15:12*). Being silent allows us to hear and reflect upon all that needs to be said. I wonder how much better understanding of issues might be accomplished if people on both sides of an issue would put into practice what we see in Acts 15?

There are times when silence is prudent. Listening instead of talking over a person allows one to hear what is actually being said. Then, the silence gives one time to reflect upon what is being presented before answering. Are you wise in your communication with others?