

ANAHEIM COMMUNITY CONNECTION (ACC) for February 21, 2021

Our focus for worship today is: *When God is Silent*

I. **OPENING PRAYER:** Pray that we will see our desperate need for God in His Sovereign silence.

II. **COMMUNITY CONNECTION:**

Share at time when silence was a blessed experience and when it was a brutal experience. What made the difference?
How does the silence in human relationships compare with the silence from God?

III. **CHRIST CONNECTION:**

PSALM 44:17-26

A. WHEN GOD IS SOVEREIGNLY SILENT IN MY OBEDIENCE, I TRUST IN HIS PURPOSES

¹⁷ *All this has come upon us, but we have not forgotten You, And we have not dealt falsely with Your covenant.* ¹⁸ *Our heart has not turned back, And our steps have not deviated from Your way,* ¹⁹ *Yet You have crushed us in a place of jackals And covered us with the shadow of death.*

"...but we have not forgotten You...our heart has not turned back...our steps have not deviated from Your way..." Suffering due to our rebellion is many times easier to accept than suffering in our obedience. In the midst of difficulties, it would be easy to run away from God. Yet for those that are redeemed by Christ, in difficulties and trials we run to God, who is our only hope. This was the case for the people of God during this season of suffering. They ran to God and did not forget Him. They kept Him on the forefront of their mind and hearts. Even as they endured the affliction, they closely examined their hearts and their lives to see if they are being disciplined for any rebellion. To their estimation, their inner life coincided with their external life – their walk matched their talk and vice versa. Their heart was directed towards God and for God. While there was no hypocrisy, God gave them a dose of humility.

"Yet You have crushed us...and covered us..." For God's people, God's response did not make sense. In His Sovereignty, He crushed and covered them. It was by His hand and for His purposes. Crushing indicates a dashing to pieces as a picture of defeat. They were already in a desolate place – in the haunts where only scavengers roam. To add insult to injury they were utterly defeated in their aloneness. Even more, their mortality and the reality of death hung over them like a garment covering. As mentioned in the last week, this is the experience of the martyrs and prayers of the persecuted. They faithfully followed God's way with a heart for Him and received defeat and the shadow of death. Yet in it, they see God's hand and see God's purposes. Their proclamation of obedience and faithfulness indicates that they will continue to do so – even when alone, even when crushed, and even in facing death. When their situation does not make sense, they continue to trust and obey.

- Share a time when your sufferings or trials did not make sense to you. How did you endure?

- What do we typically expect from God for we obedience and faithfulness? Why are we surprised by trial and suffering?

B. WHEN GOD IS SOVEREIGNLY SILENT IN MY FAITHFULNESS, I KNOW I SUFFER FOR HIS NAME

²⁰ *If we had forgotten the name of our God Or extended our hands to a strange god,* ²¹ *Would not God find this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart.* ²² *But for Your sake we are killed all day long; We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.*

"...Would not God find this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart..." They understood that God knew everything, and their hearts were exposed to His omniscient light. The name of God – His character, His person, His actions, His deeds – were not forgotten by His people. They did not *extend our hands* in a prayer gesture toward any other idol. Nothing is hidden from God. He examines our hearts, our minds, our motives – everything. What is secret to everyone else is not hidden from Him. There was no sin of neglect. There was no sin of idolatry. They were confident their suffering was not from their sin, or God would have pointed it out to them. Instead, they understood their suffering was for His sake.

"...But for Your sake we are killed all day long..." The reason for their suffering was not them, but Him. It was because they were known as the people of God – living for His praise, seeking for His fame and proclaiming His name – that they are being oppressed. They are losing their lives for His name. As Christ Jesus taught that no servant is greater than his Master – for they persecuted Christ and will do the same to His followers. *Killed all day long.* The threat of death is constant and continuous – it is all day long. They experienced relentless persecution because of God. The picture of the sheep in a slaughtering line indicates there was an expectation of death and affliction for all those involved. These verses were quoted by Paul in Romans 8:36 when speaking on the overwhelmingly relentless, abundant, unstoppable love of Christ even in the face of ruthless persecution. While in the depth of darkness, His love will hold and carry us through until the end. Even we do forget His name or stumble in idolatry, God knows our heart and His love would continually extend to us and bring us back to His heart. Even in silence, His love is ever present. For nothing will separate us from the love of Christ, our Lord and our God.

- Knowing that God knows all things, what would he see in our hearts? Have there been instances when we forgot Him while enduring difficulties? What are the idols or "strange gods" that seem to tempt our hearts? Let His kindness bring us to repentance and turn back to Him.

- What does it look like to suffer for God's sake today? How have you suffered for God's sake? Why is it easier to accept suffering for our mistakes or for God's sake?

C. WHEN GOD IS SOVEREIGNLY SILENT IN MY QUESTIONING, I CRY OUT FOR HIS JUSTICE AND HIS LOVE

²³ Arouse Yourself, why do You sleep, O Lord? Awake, do not reject us forever. ²⁴ Why do You hide Your face And forget our affliction and our oppression? ²⁵ For our soul has sunk down into the dust; Our body cleaves to the earth. ²⁶ Rise up, be our help, And redeem us for the sake of Your lovingkindness.

"Arouse Yourself...Awake, do not reject us forever." The silence was too deafening for the people of God. They cried out in desperation for the Judge to act on their behalf. They are crying out for deliverance from the affliction and oppression. Although these cries for help may sound disrespectful or even demanding to our ears, it displayed the desperation of God's people for Him alone. There was no other help for them. They desired no one else. In their understanding of God's just and righteous name, they knew that God would not allow this oppression to go unchecked. He would arise. He would defend His people. They cry for God's deliverance on the foundation of His name as revealed in His Word. "Our soul has sunk down...our body cleaves to the earth..." They were beaten down by all the suffering that they can no longer stand up. Humiliated. Drained. Crushed.

"...Redeem us for the sake of Your lovingkindness..." When they could not rise up, God will rise up. He not only provides help but *is* our help. He is the source and means of deliverance. It is by Him and through Him. How will help? Through redemption. He will be our redemption – our ransom – to purchase our freedom. *For the sake of Your lovingkindness.* What is His motivation? His lovingkindness. His love and goodness expressed in His deliverance and redemption. As we know through the gospel, God did indeed rise up. Not just rise up to action but rise up from the grips of death into the victory of the resurrected life. He has not rejected us forever. He has not forgotten our affliction. He will stand up for His justice. He will display His love. He is our help. He is our redemption. He is our Resurrected Lord. He is our Loving and Lovely Lord Jesus Christ. All praise to Him even in His sovereign silence!

- How desperate are you for God? Why do we need the silence of God to see our desperate need for Him?

- Share how the silence has brought you closer to God. Share how He was your help even in the season of sovereign silence.

1 COR 8:1-13

In the life of a believer, there are many areas where you don't have specific biblical instructions as to what to do or not to do. These grey areas are causing grief in the community of faith. But, fundamentally we are free in the Grace of Christ to be all we can be for God and others. To balance our freedom in Christ and our responsibilities with others in our world, we make all our decisions based on 1) Love. 2) Relationship with God and 3) Build up one to another in the presence of God. The situation at Corinth involves eating food that has been offered to idols. The decision process illustrates the value system of a believer: Knowing the truth, acting in the truth, but constantly aware of one's impact on the rest of the Body of Christ which is the Church, and all on the foundation of relationship with God and the call to pursue His glory.

- In the grey areas in our community, how are you making your decisions based on love?

- How do you apply your freedom in Christ in light of God's call for us to love one another sacrificially?

IV. CARE CONNECTION:

Spend time praying for:

- Clinging to God in His Sovereign Silence
- Unity in the church
- All affected by COVID virus & illnesses
- Ministry Focus: TEENS
- Care needs / concerns
- Unbelieving friends & family