

The Silence of the Lamb

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[0:00] Vantage Point is a 2008 American political thriller. Some of you think that 2008 was centuries ago, and maybe it was.

! But it was an American political thriller. The story revolves around an attempted assassination! of the President of the United States.

And the film tells the story of the same event from the perspective or vantage point of six different people.

Something similar goes on when Matthew, Mark, Luke and John write about Jesus' death. They're all looking at the same event, but they come at it from four different angles.

That's why there's differences, especially in the details of their accounts. That, by the way, shows the authenticity that it's a true eyewitness account.

[1:12] Because eyewitnesses accounts of the same event differ from people to people. You know, if there was a crash outside the church tonight and you saw it, you might say, oh, a car ran into a pedestrian. Somebody else might say, a car ran into a lady.

I might say, it was a red Ford Focus that ran into a lady. And a car ran into a ■ desde one but not in the other. However, if we come across all four of them telling us the same detail, then we need to pay attention because that detail is important. And all four of them highlight how Jesus remained silent during his two trials, his Jewish trial before the Sanhedrin, which was presided over by Caiaphas, the high priest, and then his Roman trial before Pontius Pilate, the Roman military governor of Judea. And at his Jewish trial, Mark tells us that Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. At the initial stage of his Roman trial, Matthew tells us that when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate asked him, do you not hear the testimony they're bringing against you? But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge.

And then in a desperate attempt not to have him to make a decision about Jesus, Pilate tried to pass the buck and sent Jesus off to be interrogated by Herod. And Luke tells us Herod piled him with many questions, but Jesus gave no answer. And when Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate, and after the Passover amnesty had failed to get Pilate off the hook because the crowd voted for Barabbas, Pilate, Pilate, and then he said, do you not. And he said, do you not.

But Jesus gave him no answer. So Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are all telling us that during his trials, Jesus' silence was deafening.

But why did Jesus remain silent? That's the issue I want us to explore. Tonight. And I want to use a verse from Isaiah that we just read about the silence of the Lamb.

[4:20] Why was the Lamb silent? And I think as we explore this, Jesus will take us further and further into the meaning of his death on the cross.

And the first place, in the first place, the Bible tells us that Jesus kept silent in order to point to his identity. Everything that Jesus did and said was calculated, was deliberate.

It was to get tongues wagging and talking about him. As they saw his miracles and listened to his teaching, people started asking the question, who is this?

This was not your bog standard rabbi. There was something different about Jesus. And Jesus answered this question by, in terms of the issue of his identity, by taking people back to the Old Testament and its prediction that one day God himself would come and save his people.

And as he deliberately fulfilled the predictions of the Old Testament, Jesus was pointing people to himself and saying, the waiting is over.

[5:45] That he was God in a real humanity who had arrived on the scene of history to save his people. And many of those predictions are concentrated in four poems known as the servant songs that are tucked away in the second part of Isaiah.

These four poems tell of a figure called the servant of the Lord, who while being undoubtedly human, was also divine.

And he would deal effectively with the problem of sin by dying a violent death. And throughout his life, and especially the last week of his life, Jesus deliberately goes out of his way to fulfill all that these poems said about him.

And especially the fourth one that we read tonight, he deliberately, you just can see him just going through it and ticking all the boxes. Read the story of Jesus from Palm Sunday to his resurrection. And you'll just see him with Isaiah 52, 12, 13 to 53 in front of you. And you'll see Jesus ticking off all the boxes. And one of the things that the fourth servant song said about the servant of the Lord, who would be God himself and a real humanity coming to save his people, is this, Isaiah 53 verse 7.

[7:14] He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he didn't open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

So when Jesus says nothing, when he keeps quiet, when he gives no answer during his trials, he's ticking that Isaiah 53 box.

So here's the first reason for Jesus' silence. He didn't speak so that he might point us to his identity as the servant of the Lord, the coming Savior who would die a violent substitutionary death that would save us from our sins.

Now, the second reason why Jesus, the lamb, remained silent was this, to provide an example, to provide an example. Now, Jesus was not the first or the last person to suffer unjustly.

People have suffered injustice throughout history, and they still suffer injustice. This means that in the sinful world, this fallen world in which we live, we too are going to be ill-treated and dealt with unfairly.

[8:40] We're warned about this again and again in the Bible. I'm sometimes baffled at myself, and maybe you're baffled at yourself, when we get surprised when we're treated unfairly.

Because the Bible tells us again and again we're going to be treated unfairly. Bill Gates, as you know, one of the founders of Microsoft, he was invited back to his old school to give the sort of graduation address.

And the principal, when he interviewed him, and asked him what was the best bit of advice he ever received. And Bill Gates is reputed to have said, the world is an unfair place, and you're going to be treated unfairly, so get used to it.

Get used to it. Life is not fair. That's just the reality of life. And it's especially unfair for us who are Christians.

First Peter is telling us, we're going to be treated unjustly. So the question is this, if we can't avoid being treated unjustly, how are we going to react to it?

[9:54] How are we going to deal with the inevitable injustices that we'll meet in this world? We're not responsible for the injustices that we face.

They don't define us. We're not responsible for them. But we are responsible how we respond to them. And this is where Jesus' example kicks in.

On a scale of 1 to 10, the injustice Jesus experienced scored 73. But how did he react to it?

He was silent. He didn't open his mouth. What Jesus encountered during his trials would have every human rights lawyer in the world jumping up and down with rage.

So his silence is strange, particularly in view of the injustice and unfairness that was being done to him.

[10:58] Everyone involved, the high priest, Pilate, Herod, they were actually astonished by the way that Jesus reacted. I would probably guess that Pilate and Herod never had anyone like Jesus in their courts before.

They were used to criminals complaining, protesting their innocence, begging for mercy, screaming in fear, cursing their accusers, but not keeping silent, not opening their mouths.

Someone who witnessed Jesus' response to the injustice he faced was Peter. Matthew tells us that when Jesus was hauled in before the Sanhedrin, that Peter managed to get access into the courtroom scene.

I don't know how he did it, but he managed to get access to it. And he sat down to see the outcome. As he later reflected on what he had witnessed that night, Peter states that Jesus' silence provides an example for us when we experience unfair treatment and injustice.

[12:25] 1 Peter 2, verses 21, 23, To this you were called because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps.

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

Peter is writing to Christians who were suffering unjustly. They were suffering simply because they were Christians and not because they'd done anything wrong.

He tells them this happened to Jesus. But when he was treated unfairly, he didn't hit back. He didn't strike back.

He didn't hit out. He didn't speak angrily. He didn't counterattack. He didn't retaliate. He didn't fight fire with fire. He was silent.

[13:28] And in doing so, Peter says he's providing us with an example to follow. And suddenly this makes all this talk about Jesus remaining silent not long ago and far away stuff.

It's bang up to date. Isaiah 53's focus on the silence of the Lamb is very practical to us because we will be treated unfairly, discriminated against.

We'll face injustices simply because we are Christians. It comes with the territory of being a Christian. This is what happened to Jesus so it will happen to us if we follow Jesus.

Why should we expect to follow Jesus and think this won't happen to us? What do we do when we suffer unjustly for being a Christian?

We don't answer back. We don't retaliate. We don't strike out. Jesus was silent. He didn't open his mouth. And Jesus is saying by his example that when we are treated unfairly we just keep our mouths closed.

[14:48] That's a difficult thing, isn't it? Whoever said being a Christian was easy? It's good. It's not easy.

I remember speaking in this passage a number of years ago to a group of pastors in Nigeria who had a few years previously been driven out of their land because they were Christians and they were just coming back.

that's pretty pertinent to a group of men who had seen members of their church killed and treated unfairly.

It's a difficult thing to do but that's what Jesus calls us to do as Christians. One commentator writing on this passage in 1 Peter says, uncomplaining suffering when wronged is one of the clearest proofs of genuine Christianity.

Christianity. The example Jesus sets is clear he didn't open his mouth but it's also challenging it's not easy it's not easy.

[16:02] Here's another reason why Jesus remains silent and we're beginning to go a little bit deeper into the meaning of the cross and it was in the third place to prove himself willing.

In our judicial system today why is the right of a person on trial to be heard enshrined in our judicial system?

It's so that the accused may escape punishment. It's so that he might deny the charges and plead extenuating circumstances. It's so that he might appeal to the court and say something which will turn aside the verdict.

We don't expect the accused to agree with the prosecutor. He's not going to incriminate himself and say something well you know actually the prosecutor could have said a lot more about me than he did and here's a couple of examples of my crime that I didn't mention.

You're not going to hear about that. everybody's going to do a Gillian Maxwell when hauled up before conference and say I'm pleading the Fifth Amendment and going to say nothing.

[17:21] No the accused defends himself and that's why Pilate was astonished at Jesus' silence. Pilate had been around the legal block a few times but he never come across anybody like Jesus before.

He was used with having to tell the defendant to shut up and keep quiet. He was used with defendants reeling off a whole clatter of excuses. He was used to the mothers of defendants telling him that their sons were really good boys at heart and were just being a little bit naughty.

Pilate wanted to let Jesus go. You could see that from the stories. He was an experienced Roman administrator. He knew that the charges were trumped up.

He was very reluctant to punish Jesus. That's why he tried to put in place the Passover amnesty.

He knew Jesus was innocent. He wanted Jesus to give him an opportunity to let him go.

He's giving Jesus more than a nudge and a wink when he says to him have you nothing to say. But Jesus is silent.

[18:43] Why? Because he knew he had to die. He dare not speak a single word in his own defense in case he was released.

He knew that if he had done so, Pilate would have let him off. Jesus was not there to be released. He was there to be put to death. He was not there to be defended. He was there to be accused. He was not there to be found innocent.

He was there to be found guilty. The charges against Jesus were ludicrous. the people who were bribed to bring the accusations against him, they couldn't coordinate their story.

So they came up with embarrassing different accounts. It wouldn't have been difficult to secure an acquittal, but Jesus had come to die.

[19:50] That was the whole purpose of his mission to earth. it was essential then that he kept quiet. He could not, he dare not, speak a word to protect himself.

However, Jesus had to prove himself willing in a deeper sense. What is it that lies at the heart of sin?

That's a good religious word. that sort of, what is it that lies? What's sin all about? Well, one of the things when everything is said and done, one of the things that sin is all about is rebellion.

At the heart of sin is a human being setting his own will against that of God. God's At the heart of sin is me putting my will against God's will.

It's you putting your will against God's will. Adam said, I know what God wants me to do, but this is what I want to do.

[21:12] and I'm going to do what I want to do and not what God wants to do. I'm going to follow my will and not God's. Sin is a rebellion of the will against God.

sin. And how can it be dealt with? How can it be atoned for? It can only be atoned for by a responsible human being.

We sin as responsible human beings. We know exactly what we're doing.

Atonement must be carried out by a responsible human being who knows exactly what he's doing.

The sacrifice for sin has to be a sacrifice consciously offered knowing what was involved.

And it also has to be a sacrifice that's willingly offered. It wouldn't do for God to carry Jesus kicking and screaming to the cross.

[22:22] A struggling victim couldn't atone for sin. For sin is conscious rebellion of the will against God's will.

So atoning sacrifice must be willingly accepted. As the heart of sin is the rebellious will, so the heart of atonement is the submissive will.

Jesus must not only die, he must also willingly die. It's a job, as C.S. Lewis puts it, for a volunteer.

Do you remember how Paul writes about Jesus' willingness? Philippians 2 verse 8, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Jesus' life was not taken from him. He laid it down. He offered himself willingly.

[23:29] So why is the lamb silent? Why does he not defend himself? Why does he not plead his case? Because he is willing to die. It's because he takes complete delight in doing his father's will, that Jesus is silent.

But I think there's a fourth and probably the most profound reason why Jesus remains silent, and it's this to plead guilty. We've thought about the unjust treatment that Jesus experienced, and yet, in the ultimate sense, the treatment he received was perfectly just.

Two charges were brought against Jesus of Nazareth, one in the Jewish religious court, and one in the Roman political court. In the Jewish religious court, Jesus was charged with blasphemy. blasphemy, in the Roman political court, Jesus was accused of treason. And blasphemy and the treason were the charges with which Jesus was indicted.

Now, again, the charges are absurd. Jesus never blasphemed because he was God. Jesus never advocated treason against the emperor.

[24:55] So why is he silent? Why does he not defend himself against these obviously trumped up charges? He's silent because he's pleading guilty.

It's because of something that happened centuries earlier. In the Garden of Eden, Adam, the first man, was guilty of two sins, blasphemy and rebellion.

Satan said to him, you can be like God. And Adam said to himself, I fancy a bit of that. He wanted to be like God.

Adam was also guilty of treason. He disobeyed the clear command of God the king. The first man is guilty of blasphemy and treason.

And now centuries later, Jesus, the last Adam, the second man, has two charges brought against him by jealous, crooked politicians and ecclesiocrats, blasphemy and rebellion.

[26:05] And Jesus stands on trial, accused of the very sins and crimes as we are accused of. and by his silence, he is pleading guilty.

Now, you do need to understand why there are similarities between our legal system and the Roman legal system. There's one big difference. In our legal system, remaining silent is not an admission of guilt.

guilt. That's why you complete the Fifth Amendment. It's not an admission of guilt. In complete contrast, in the Roman system of government, of legal system, and Jesus was tried under the Roman legal system, not the UK legal system or Scottish legal system, under the Roman legal system, to remain silent was an admission of guilt.

By saying nothing in this trial before Pilate, Jesus was pleading guilty to the crimes of blasphemy and rebellion. Jesus' silence was a guilty silence.

He's representing us. We are the blasphemers. because as well as being rebellion against God, sin is also playing at being God.

[27:45] And when Jesus, our representative, is charged with treason and blasphemy, he bows his head and remains silent.

He accepts the charges. He admits the guilt. This is the reason for a silence. having become answerable for our guilt, he submits silently to the sentence.

At that moment, Jesus has been charged with our sins as the Lord lays on him the iniquity of us all. One word from Jesus would set him free.

one word would secure his acquittal. But he's silent, guilty as charged.

He stands in our place, taking the blame, bearing the curse, absorbing the penalty, receiving the punishment.

[28:55] He is guilty, and he gets what guilty people deserve death. But his guilty silence is our salvation.

His silence is his acceptance of our guilt and our punishment. The charges are made, the guilt is not denied, the innocent man will not defend himself, because from all eternity, he has committed himself to dying for guilty sinners like us.

And because of the silence of the Lamb, we're saved. And as a result of Jesus' death, the consequence of a silence, God restores friendship between himself and those isolated from him. God pardons those who have deliberately rejected his legitimate claims over their lives. God forgives those who have played at being their own God.

God brings outsiders and those far away into his family. God secures a future for those who fear that nothing positive lies ahead for them because of something that's happened to them in the past.

[30:29] God gives eternal life to those who are spiritually dead. As a result of Jesus' death, the consequence of his silence, God makes those who are spiritually poor, spiritually rich.

God makes those who are spiritually weak, spiritually strong. God makes those who are spiritually ignorant, wise for salvation.

God puts right with himself those who are failures and flawed. God comforts those who are distressed and troubled and overwhelmed.

God reassures those who have doubts about their salvation. God gives hope to those who are despairing. God sets us free to love and to live for and to obey and to follow Jesus.

Those who are enslaved and crushed by the oppression of Satan and the tyranny of their own sinful self and addiction to evil desires.

[31:39] What a comprehensive, all-embracing salvation Jesus has secured by his death, the consequence of his silence.

It's everything that people today long for. Friendship, forgiveness, community, hope, security, strength, wisdom, comfort, reassurance, freedom.

Freedom. And by means of his death, he offers that salvation as a gift. But you must realize that you can't have the gifts of salvation apart from the giver of salvation.

salvation. There's lots of people today who would really enjoy friendship and forgiveness and community and security and hope and freedom and all that thing.

They want those things but they don't want Jesus. But you can't have the gifts of salvation without Jesus, the giver of salvation. salvation. And that's why if you want to experience all that Jesus has achieved by his death, you must come to him alone and trust in him alone.

[33:09] I wonder tonight have you done that? If you haven't, do so tonight. Don't put off trusting in Jesus for a moment longer.

And you might say to me, well, Roger, I don't know. how to do that. I'm a bit unsure about how to do that. Talk to somebody afterwards.

You know friends who are Christians. You know people in this church who are Christians. Talk to them afterwards. They'll explain to you how you can experience for yourself the salvation that the silent lamb has achieved by his death.

But many of you already do trust in Jesus. I wonder are you still trusting in Jesus alone? You see, you continue right to the end of your Christian life in exactly the same way as you began your Christian life by trusting in Jesus alone, by faith in him alone.

Faith in Jesus alone is not just the ABC of the Christian life, something that happened at the start of your Christian life. Faith in Jesus alone is the A to Z of the Christian life.

[34:33] Your continued enjoyment of this comprehensive all-embracing salvation that Jesus achieved by his death, it still depends on you continuing to realize that you can't have the gifts of salvation without Jesus, the giver of salvation.

And maybe for some of you here tonight who are Christians, your focus has slightly shifted a wee bit, shifted away from Jesus alone to maybe Jesus plus something else or someone else.

And that's who you begin to look to for your security and your hope. and your identity. If that's happened, you need to recalibrate.

You need to repent. You need to come back to Jesus and put your hope in him alone because he is the only one who can give you all that you're looking for.

And maybe some of you here tonight you're doing good. good. That's terrible grammar, but I am from Northern Ireland. You're doing good in your Christian life.

[35:52] That's brilliant, but keep on trusting in Jesus. Keep on pressing in Jesus. Keep your eyes on Jesus. Fix your eyes on him as you run the race that God has given you.

Because remember, trusting in him alone is the A to Z of the Christian life, not the beginning. Here is the lamb who is silent. so that he might bless us with the salvation.

Wherever you are, come to him. Trust in him. Keep on trusting in him. And he will bless you with all these blessings that he has achieved by his death.

and he will have to have to have to have!