

When Silence Is Golden

BROADCAST—November 25

SCRIPTURE—Psalm 46

TEXT—"Be still, and know that I am
God"—Psalm 46:10

Some time ago I read a statement which rises to haunt me in the busy rush of life. "If we would hear God's voice from time to time, we must go into the silence."

G. H. Morrison, in *The Wind on the Heath*, tells a most interesting story. Beneath the streets of the ancient city of Shechem are flowing rivers. During the busy hours of the day you cannot hear them above the noise of the narrow streets and bazaars. But when evening comes, quietness settles upon the city. Then quite clearly, in the hush of the night, you may hear the flowing music of the buried streams.

There are many such voices in life. But they can be heard only when life is still. Perhaps it is the voice of conscience, or the whisperings of the Spirit of God. Maybe it is God speaking from the pages of His blessed Book. Or the voice of memory bringing into view the goodness and greatness of God. But whatever it may be, we are the poorer from failing to hear and heed.

We can all learn a lesson from the prophet Elijah (I Kings. 19). Fleeing from the crowded ways of life, he sought refuge in a cave. Discouraged and defeated he stood in the mouth of the cave as "the Lord passed by."

He thought to find Him in a mighty wind, an earthquake, or a fire. But "the Lord was not in" any of them. And then he heard "a still small voice." And hearing it Elijah went forth encouraged and instructed to meet the demands that awaited him.

We, too, need to hear the still small voice. It was this that the psalmist had in mind when he said, "*Be still, and know that I am God*" (Ps. 46:10).

William Wordsworth reminds us that:

The world is too much with us;
late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay
waste our powers"

If these words were true over a century ago, how much more so do they apply to us today. Or twenty-seven hundred years ago when the psalmist reminded us to "be still, and know that I am God."

Therefore, as we consider these words let us note, first, the pace; second, the pause; third, the peace.

First, consider the pace. "Be still," said the psalmist. By contrast this suggests the maddening pace by which life moves.

The forty-sixth psalm describes the confused world of a far-distant day: Convulsions in nature; earthquakes and floods; convulsions among na-

tions; wars and falling kingdoms (vv. 2-3,6,9). Life was in a turmoil indeed.

But comparing the pace of that day with ours is like comparing a snail's pace to a jet liner. The word often used to describe our day is "explosion." Exploding populations threaten to crowd man off the earth. The explosion in knowledge leaves us reeling. Eighty percent of the world's total knowledge has been brought forth in the last decade. It is said that ninety percent of all the scientists who ever lived are alive today. Miracles in test tubes and satellites leave us agog and afloat on a sea of mystery.

Today's maddening pace is aggravated by our rapid means of communication. Events which a generation ago passed with scant notice are pumped into our living rooms the moment they happen. Earthquakes in Iran, typhoons in Japan, famine in China, political crises in Washington or Moscow, cold war incidents in Berlin, or hotter ones in Algeria and Laos—all become personal tragedies for billions of people.

Nor is this rapid pace confined to the distant happenings of earth. We have all become Mad Hatters in the torrid rush of life. Like the fancied rabbit in "Alice in Wonderland" we hasten here and there in "much ado about nothing." Day and night we pursue the ever elusive dollar to purchase what we call necessities, but which were unheard of items by our forefathers. Home has become little more than a filling station as mother, dad, son, and daughter scramble from here to there, with little or nothing to do when they arrive.

Our churches have not escaped the contagion of the ages. Meetings, programs, budgets, goals, and numbers so possess us that we often lose sight of the reason why. The story going the rounds tells of a Baptist visiting

a prospective member. After hearing the visitor's recital of the maze of activities, the prospect observed, "Well, I'm afraid that I am not physically able to be a Baptist." Change the name to any other denomination, and the answer is just as fitting.

And what is the result of all this hubbub? Someone remarked that the world is in danger of being kicked by the golden calf. Man has never had so much to make him happy, yet has been so miserable. Rapid communication has made the world a neighborhood, but man's greed has turned it into a jungle. Man knows more about things but less about himself. He spends billions in his conquest of outer space, yet is losing the battle in inner space.

The average man is little more than a pill-taking animal. He takes a pill to put him to sleep at night, another to get going in the morning, and nerve pills in between to keep from going berserk.

We are afraid, terribly afraid. This fear is evidenced by our frantic running here and there like ants whose ant hill has been disturbed. It is seen in our literature, so much of which deals with the sordid and base as though we have lost sight of the beautiful in life. We seek to drown our terror in so-called music that becomes ever louder and more jangled. In an effort to escape from reality, the world has gone on a sports binge as though thrills can be a substitute for happiness. Truly we need to stop, take stock, and discover afresh the true meaning and values of life, our very reason for being. Modern man desperately needs a rendezvous with himself and with God.

Second, note the pause. "Be still," says the psalmist. The Hebrew verb so translated means "to relax." So in modern parlance he is saying, "Re-

lax!" Psychiatry tells us that one of the first steps toward mental and physical healing is to relax.

But relaxation seems to be a lost art to most of us. The tempo of modern life is "go, go, go!" We would do well to look at the very old, prosaic, outmoded word "Sabbath." It means "rest." Because He knew the nature of man God gave him one day out of seven to relax, to rest in both body, mind, and spirit. In a sense, He gave us this day in which to allow our souls to catch up with our bodies.

But a pitifully small number of people use it so. When the work week is over, we "go, go, go." And the shorter the week the sooner the "go." A radio disc jockey in our city each Monday dedicates a record to the tired week-enders. It is called "Tired Blood." So exhausted, we return to our jobs depleted in bodily strength, foggy of mind, and exhausted in spirit. God's blessing has been turned into a blight. And yet we wonder why we are ever caught up in the rat race of life. For the sake of economic efficiency and physical health, if for no other reason, we would do well to rediscover God's purpose for the Sabbath day.

But relaxation is more than a condition of the body. It is also an attitude of the mind and spirit. A woman whose lot in life was hard, but who was always healthy and happy, when asked the reason, replied, "Well, when I work, I work hard, and when I sit, I sit loose." Few of us need coaching in the former, but we could use some in the latter. We need to learn to let our minds and spirits "sit loose."

And this suggests the practice of meditation. It was largely this that the psalmist had in mind when he said, "Be still [relax], and know that I am God." There are many things

which the western mind can teach the oriental. But the oriental can teach us many things also. One of these is the art of meditation. There are many things that the evangelical can teach the Catholic. But one thing above all others that the former can learn from the latter is the art of worship. I am not speaking of ritual and form. I am speaking of meditation, of quietly waiting before God.

Most every pastor knows the buzzing bedlam which precedes the worship service. One woman complained that the organ prelude was so loud that she could not hear her neighbor in the pew. When we come to worship we do not come to visit. To the preparation made by the pastor and choir should be added the preparation made by the congregation.

The words of the theme song of this program are not idle ones.

Brethren, we have met to worship,
and adore the Lord our God;
Will you pray with all your power,
while we try to preach the Word?
All is vain unless the Spirit of the
Holy One comes down;
Brethren, pray, and holy manna will
be scattered all around.

—George Atkins

However, meditation should not be confined to a place of group worship. It should be more so that of the quiet place where the soul is alone with God. Most of us do not like to be alone with ourselves or with God. When our thoughts turn inward we do not like what we see. So we seek to fill what seems to be a void by turning on the radio or television, telephoning a friend, or going shopping. Anything to escape a feeling of aloneness.

But are we alone? Not if we are willing to commune silently with the living Presence. Why not try being alone with God for just fifteen min-

utes each day. Open your Bible to some favorite passage. Let its healing balm permeate your soul. Read a verse and meditate upon it. Pray that God's Spirit will speak to you through its meaning. Lay your life bare before your heavenly Father. Confess your sins, and know His forgiveness. Place your problems before Him for His guidance. Reflect upon God's goodness as you "count your many blessings," naming them one by one. Repeat over and over the words of the psalmist, "*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer*" (19:14).

Then shall you know the meaning of the words of one who said, "By meditation I can converse with God, solace myself on the bosom of the Saviour, bathe in the rivers of divine pleasure, tread the paths of my rest, and view the mansions of eternity." "Be still, and know that I am God."

Third, consider the peace. "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge" (Ps. 46:11). So closes the forty-sixth psalm.

Scholars tell us that this psalm was written following God's miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem from the army of Sennacherib. Egypt had failed Judah as an ally. Hezekiah and his trembling people waited helplessly behind the walls of Jerusalem, momentarily expecting to hear the battering rams of the invincible conqueror. But they were never heard. Instead, the besieged people looked over the walls one morning to find the army gone, leaving a host dead in the camp.

Why? Not Judah. Not Egypt. Not some unexpected help from a new ally. But God! No wonder that the psalmist sang, "*God is our refuge and strength, a very pleasant help in trouble*" (v.1). Let nature itself con-

vulse and rebel. "God is our refuge." Let the heathen rage. Let kingdoms fall. "The Lord of hosts is with us." Meditate upon these truths, says the psalmist. "Be still, and know that I am God."

What was true then is a thousand-fold more so today. Let the world rush headlong toward its own destruction. Let the milling throngs shout amid the bazaars of life, "getting and spending." But underneath every city, hamlet, and home "*there is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God . . .*" (Ps. 46:4). But if you would hear the music of its flowing waters you must "be still, and know that [He] is God."

In a time of great crisis Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled." I am told that the Uduks of Sudan translate this, "Don't shiver in your livers." But by whatever words you may translate it, it means "Have faith in God."

About a year ago I stood in the room in London where John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, died. I am told that his last words were "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." What a blessed legacy to leave for those of us who come after him! He could do so because, in one of the busiest lives on record, he found time to "Be still, and know that I am God."

And so must we if we are to live the life triumphant.

Free to WRITERS

seeking a book publisher

Two illustrated brochures reveal how we can publish, promote and sell your book; tips to writers; facts and figures on how we published over 3000 authors. All types of books wanted. Write Dept. B-12
Exposition Press, 386 Park Ave. S., N.Y. 16
