

When God is Hidden or Silent

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As we approach Purim this year,¹ it seems a good time to encourage one another to hold onto our confidence and faith in God, even when He seems hidden or silent. The Book of Esther almost didn't make it into the canon of the Bible because the name of God is not mentioned even once! The name, Esther, אסתר comes from a Hebrew word, L'hastir, להסתיר meaning to hide. Although God may have been hidden, He was still actively at work behind the scenes, making sure that the right people would be in the right places at exactly the right moments, taking right actions for the good and the salvation of His people. God may, at times, hide His face from us and seem unresponsive to our desperate pleas for help. It may feel like dialing 911 in some kind of dire emergency and receiving no response.² We may wonder where God has disappeared when it seems like we need Him the most. I watched a poignant movie several years ago which replayed recently called *Miracle on 49th Street* (I think), about a crippled boy who loves car racing and whose idol is a famous race car driver. In his imagination, this little boy visits God from time to time, but heaven is an old garage, and God is this race car driver whom he admires. 'God' converses easily with the little boy about his life and different situations, but when most discouraged and troubled, the boy calls out to God but there is no answer. He is not there. The desperate boy hears only a deafening silence.

At times like these, it is easy to feel ignored, forsaken, and forgotten, even by God Himself. Israel has felt this way at times: **“But Zion said, “The Lord has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me.”** The Hebrew word for forsaken is 'azav' עזב. Yeshua knew the deep grief of abandonment when he cried out to His Father on the cross, **Eli, Eli, lama azavtani?** (*My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?*)

Haven't we all felt this way at very low times in our lives? Forsaken and forgotten? I will never forget the time, as a new Believer, standing outside a Church in the pouring rain, weeping. I could not even enter the Sanctuary because, as the victim of an abusive relationship, I felt so unworthy and my faith was so weak. The precious pastor must have seen me standing out there alone and so he came out to join me, seeming not noticing that his expensive suit was becoming completely soaked. He spoke just a few simple words to me but they brought such comfort to my soul that I was able to go on with God and with life itself. He said, **“Hannah, you are not forgotten.”** This was God's reply to Israel as well, **“Can a woman forget her nursing child,**

¹ March 20 – 21, 2011

² Israel my Glory, March/April 2011

and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands”³

Recently, Merv and Merla Watson came to bless us with their gift of music at a gathering of Believers. I enjoyed all of their music, but when they sang this one song, I felt such a presence of the Holy Spirit. They simply sang, as the voice of God to us, “I will not forget you.” As Merla dramatized the song with the tender movements of a mother holding and comforting her infant child against her shoulder, I began to weep and weep. When we hear of a tragedy like the one that just occurred in Itamar, where an assailant invades a Jewish home and brutally murders several members of the family in cold blood, including a three month old baby, lying with its mother, we cry out, “*God, where are You? Why have You forsaken us? Why do you allow our enemies to triumph over us?*” And yet all we hear in response is silence.

There are no easy answers here. King David also expressed his distress and anguish over God’s silence in Psalm 13, “**How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide (tastir) [תסתיר] Your face from me? ...How long will my enemy be exalted over me?**” (Psalm 13:1-2) We may have been suffering through some kind of circumstance for such a prolonged period of time that we cry out like David, “*How long, O Lord....How long will I suffer from this affliction until I am healed? How long until my prodigal son gets off drugs and comes back to You? How long until I see some kind of breakthrough in my financial situation? In my marriage relationship?....*” It may seem like the enemy is getting the upper hand, but of this one thing we can be assured – God is at work behind the scenes and will cause all things to work out for our good – even those things that were meant for evil. There comes a time when we have to stand on the truth of God’s character – His goodness and faithfulness – and not on our feelings or current experience. We know that God is there. One of His names is Y’HVH SHAMAH. It simply means God is There. In order to please God, we must have faith that He exists, and is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

Sometimes it just seems like Yeshua is asleep in the boat right in the midst of a life-threatening storm, and we cry out, “Master, don’t you care that we are perishing?” Aha – here is the heart of the issue – ‘don’t you care?’ This is what the enemy wants us to believe – that “*Okay, maybe God exists, but actually He doesn’t really care about what you are going through. In fact, He doesn’t care about you at all!*” But this is a lie! Satan is a liar and the father of lies. Maybe we had an earthly father who ignored us or didn’t seem to care. Maybe when we grew up, we had a spouse who ignored us, didn’t want to listen to us, and didn’t seem to care when we were sick, upset, or in trouble. But this is not the nature of our loving, Heavenly Father. For God is love. And He deeply cares for us, His covenant children. “**Cast your burdens upon the Lord, for He cares for you**.” (1 Peter 5:7) We don’t need to figure everything out; we don’t need all the answers to how this thing is going to work itself out or how we’re going to solve every problem.

³ Isaiah 49:14-16

We just need to rest in the knowledge that our Heavenly Father deeply loves and cares for us – even when He seems hidden like in the Book of Esther or silent in response to our cries.

After Yeshua had spoken peace (shalom) to the wind and waves, how did He respond to his frightened, panicked disciples? “Oh ye of little faith.” Sometimes God just wants to see our faith at work in a storm when he is there but silent; He wants to see if we will panic and cower in fear or if we will stand in confidence knowing that God is in control. But sometimes God may test our faith in His silences. Often a teacher will work with her students for a period of time and then administer a test. Before and after the test, the teacher is willing to assist and help problem-solve, but during the actual test itself, the teacher is silent – even if the student is struggling or doesn’t know the answer to the problem. But the master is still there, still in charge, and still cares, just temporarily silent.

Not only does God care for us, but He delights in us! Sometimes I find it truly hard to believe that my Heavenly Father feels this way about me, but may God’s word be true and every man a liar! This is God’s word: **“It will no longer be said of you (f) anymore ‘Azuvah’ (Forsaken), nor shall your land (Zion) any more be termed Desolate (Sh’mamah), but you shall be called Hephtzi-bah (My Delight is in her), and your land B’eulah (married), for the Lord delights in you and your land shall be married.”** (Isaiah 62:4-5) Yes, this promise is primarily for and about Zion and Israel. But as the Bride of the Messiah, God, as a Bridegroom, is also rejoicing over us. We are to give God no rest until He makes Jerusalem the praise of the earth. **“Say to the daughters of Zion, our salvation (Yeshua) is coming! And we shall be called Holy People, the Redeemed of the Lord, Sought Out, and not forsaken (azavah).”**⁴

Just as Esther petitioned the King for the salvation of the Jewish people, may an Esther Church, covered in the blood of the Lamb, come boldly to the Throne of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords to plead for the salvation of His covenant people, Israel. This is not a time for the Church to remain silent. Perhaps God is silent because He wants His people to cry out to Him. These words that Mordechai spoke to Esther thousands of years ago, may be the Holy Spirit speaking to the Church today:

“So not think in your heart that you will escape in the king’s palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. YET WHO KNOWS IF YOU HAVE COME TO THE KINGDOM FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS?” (Esther 4:13-14)

The forces of Amalek that tried to bring forth their evil plans through one of their descendants, Haman, in ancient Persia (modern day Iran), are still at work today to bring about the destruction of Israel. God says He will be at war with Amalek forever, throughout all our generations. And if we are God’s servants, then we are all enlisted in this battle. These forces of darkness do not hate merely the Jews, but also Christians and everyone who will not bow their knee to their ‘god’.

⁴ Isa. 62:11-12

Esther, an orphaned Jewish girl, was willing to lay down her life to save her people. Will we who have been brought into the Kingdom for such a time as this, be willing to do the same?

“When I cry out to You, then my enemies will turn back; this I know, because God is for me. In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?” (Psalm 56:9-11)

Will you join me in crying out to God that all those who hate Zion will be turned back and be ashamed? And let us always hold firmly in our hearts the deep conviction that our God is with us; and He is for us. He loves us and will never forget us. He cares for us and delights in us. We are married (in covenant relationship) with God. He promises to never leave us or forsake us. Ever. We need not fear but have faith and put our trust in Him. So no matter what the circumstances look like, even if God seems hidden...or silent...may we say like Job, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.” **He that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.** Amen.

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