

THE ART OF BEING STILL

In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength. (Isa. 30: 15b)
 Be still, and know that I am God. (Ps. 46: 10a)

Among the collection of ancient sonnets known as the psalms of David, there were special contributions made by other writers. Psalm 46 is an outstanding example of that fact; it expresses the emotions of a person enduring great difficulties. It begins with "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble." It ends with "The LORD of Hosts is with us." This was not one of the psalms of David, and most theologians attribute the work to Hezekiah, one of the later kings of Judah. If that assumption is correct, there were two incidents in the life of the monarch to which this song might belong. The first was connected with the boastful threat of Rabshakeh, who sent a blasphemous letter to Hezekiah; the second when the king was told to set his house in order and prepare to die (see Isa. 37:9-14 and 38:7). When the king of Judah was overwhelmed by circumstances beyond his control, the prophet ministered to him, and the Lord said, "Be still, and know that I am God."

Obeying this command does not infer that one has to be lazy. Being motionless does not necessarily mean doing nothing. To remain still in the face of advancing danger takes more courage than is natural among men and women. It means ceasing to rely upon self, and trusting implicitly in the promises of God.

Hezekiah, the king of Judah, was in great trouble. A huge army of heathens was about to destroy Jerusalem, and there was nothing the monarch could do to prevent the disaster. The fact that he was partly to blame for the situation did not decrease his fear. He had taken the gold and silver from the temple hoping it would purchase peace. Unfortunately, the sight of such treasure increased the avarice of the enemy, and Hezekiah quickly discovered "he had gone out of the frying pan into the fire."

A blasphemous letter had just arrived from the leader of the threatening army in which he said, "Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed; as Gozan, and Haran, and Rezeph, and the children of Eden which were in Thelasar?" (2 Kings 19:10-12). Hezekiah realized he was as a bird trapped in a cage; he was helpless.

Be Still ... and Listen

"And Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up into the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD" (2 Kings 19:14). The twin sister of despair is panic. When disaster appears inevitable the natural tendency is to cease struggling, and that decision often leads to suicide. The only wise alternative is to take the problem to God and seek from Him wisdom to meet the need. Someone has written a thought-provoking poem:

All the water in the world
 However hard it tried,
 Could never never sink a ship
 Unless it got inside.

All the hardships of this world

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Might wear you pretty thin;
But they won't hurt you one least bit
Unless you let them in.

Most people are too busy to listen to God, but increased activities cannot silence the voice of conscience. Men who never commune with the Almighty are out of touch with reality. Elijah was an example of that truth. When he was presented with the opportunity to lead his nation to repentance and blessing, he heard the threats of an irate queen and fearing for his life, sought refuge in flight. Alas, he discovered he could not run away from himself or God.

And he [the angel of the Lord] said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the

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rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire, a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah? (1 Kings 19:11-13, emphasis mine)

The prophet was a great orator, but in the mouth of that mountain cave, he became still and listened. Blessed are they who emulate his example.

Be Still... and Learn

Hezekiah and the prophet Elijah had much in common. When Rabshakeh sent his threatening letter, the king of Judah spread it before the Lord and listened. After he confessed his fears, he heard the reassuring voice of Jehovah and peace filled his troubled soul. When he was informed of his approaching death, he lay upon a bed and wept, and his desperate cry for help brought a thrilling response: "Then came the word of the LORD to Isaiah, saying, Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years" (Isa. 38:4-5).

Similarly when Elijah listened to the voice of God he was amazed to hear that his preconceived ideas were mistaken. He had been convinced he was the only believer left in the nation, and said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away" (1 Kings 19:14, emphasis mine). "And the LORD said unto him... Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him" (1 Kings 19:15a, 18).

Self-pity is a deadly enemy; it suggests a man is looking at himself instead of the Lord. It proves the complainant is displeased with his circumstances, and indirectly blames God for not intervening on his behalf. "Oh God, I have been such an asset to your kingdom, and I deserve better treatment than I have received!" Poor Hezekiah; poor Elijah; poor me!

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Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
Forgive our foolish ways.

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Reclothe us in our rightful minds,
In purer lives, Thy service find,
In deeper reverence, praise.

Drop Thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of Thy peace.
ÄI. G. Whittier

Be Still... and Look

The servant of Elisha was very frightened, for when he looked through his window, he saw the city was surrounded by Syrians who were determined to capture and possibly execute his master. Every exit from the city was blocked and escape appeared to be impossible. Frantically he exclaimed, "Alas, my master! how shall we do?" And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the LORD, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha" (2 Kings 6:15b, 17Ä18).

Sometimes the vision of men and women is impaired by cataracts of unbelief. Elijah complained; Hezekiah wept; Elisha's servant was terrified; but the true man of God saw the invisible. There was no cause for concern for he said, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them" (2 Kings 6:16). It is natural for drowning men to struggle, but safety depends upon complete trust in a rescuer. Yet it takes courage to lie still and be drawn to safety. Desperation begets agitation, and often we believe that without our aid God can do nothing! When problems beset the soul it is easy to believe that no other person ever endured our trials. That conclusion is wrong. God is capable of solving every problem and lifting every burden. Humans desire immediate action, and when it is not forthcoming, the Lord is charged with being insensitive to the needs of His followers. Someone has written,

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Doubt sees the obstacles;
Faith sees the way.
Doubt sees the darkest night;
Faith sees the day.
Doubt dreads to take a step;
Faith soars on high.
Doubt questions. "Who believes?"
Faith answers

Be Still ... and Love

When Hezekiah placed the heathen's letter before the Lord he was told exactly what to expect, and the prediction was fulfilled (see Isa. 37:33Ä38). It would be difficult not to love the One whose miraculous intervention was unmistakable. The same truth was evident in the story of Mary who sat at the feet of Jesus. Martha was concerned with much service, but her sister chose to sit at the feet of Jesus, apparently doing nothing! Whether or not she was justified has caused endless debates within the church, but her desire to be close to her Lord was evident. Mary sat at the Savior's feet and listened, learned, looked, and loved. Some people insist she was not a practical Christian, avoiding work under the pretense of wishing to know more about Jesus. No argument can change the fact that when the Lord described

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her action, He indicated that sitting at His feet was more important than cooking in the kitchen! He said, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41-42).

When Mary anointed the Lord with ointment, Jesus said, ". . . . against the day of my burying hath she kept this" (John 12:7). The disciples were thinking only of the anticipated kingdom, but Mary knew her Master was soon to die. At that point in time she was the only disciple who knew about Christ's approaching death. That realization enabled her to share her treasure before it was too late to give Him anything. Perhaps she did not understand the details of the sacrificial death of the Redeemer, but her love was unquestionable.

When Jehovah spoke through Isaiah to Israel He said, "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength," but this only becomes possible when the soul was filled with trust. It is difficult to wait patiently for Him unless one is motivated by the belief that God is equal to every demand made upon Him.

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During my evangelistic work in Canada I met many wonderful people and heard thrilling anecdotes, but none surpassed that which concerned a troubled pastor. A delightful event had been reported in the media, and its message helped to restore the minister's health: A street was to be widened, and to make this possible, certain trees had to be removed. The foreman in charge of the operation noticed that in the branches of one of the trees a robin was sitting on her nest. He ordered his workers to proceed with the other trees and wait until the empty nest informed them the family of birds had flown away. When it was safe to tear down the tree, the foreman saw something white in the bottom of the nest, and on closer examination discovered a small card, which had come from a nearby Sunday school. When he separated this from the mud and sticks in the nest, he read the simple message: "We trust the Lord our God." That story removed the despondency of the pastor who read of the incident in the local newspaper.

The touch that heals the broken heart
Is never felt above:
The angels know His blessedness,
The way-worn saints—His love!
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