

The Silent Years

By RT Nusbaum

Introduction

Many people think that those who are able to minister mightily for the Lord were just one day hit with the “anointing” or with a ministry call that immediately empowered them. I do not know about modern day ministers but the ones from the Bible underwent tremendous preparation before God released His gifts and power through them. An example of this would be Moses who spent forty years in the wilderness before God’s power flowed through him as he stood before Pharaoh. Though called and anointed as king, David spent years tending sheep or living in caves before God allowed him to wield the power of the throne (I Sam. 16:11; 22:1). The Bible is full of such examples. In many cases there is no record of what took place during their years of preparation. For those of whom this period of preparation is unrecorded and untold, those years could be known as the “silent years”. Jesus Himself had a period between His showing in the temple at twelve years of age and when He stepped into the Jordan River and was baptized by John the Baptist. For Jesus, the preparation was about eighteen years. Though Jesus was the Son of God from eternity, He laid it all down to walk as a man. All the power that came forth from Jesus during His ministry came as a result of what took place while He was hid during the silent years.

There is much speculation and folklore concerning those eighteen years. Some people who seem to be “in the know” about those silent years tell of how Jesus did unusual miracles or went to such and such place during those years but no one really knows based on Biblical account for there is no record. However, I am sure there were no miracles performed by a young or teenage Jesus because the Bible clearly states that His first miracle was at the wedding of Cana (John 2:1-11). Anyone who tries to tell you that Jesus did any miracles before turning the water into wine is leading you contrary to Biblical account and is open to speculation and myth. May all of our teachers stand on more solid ground than mere hearsay and conjecture. A shadow of doubt or at least a question mark should arise when any supposed “man of God” freely ignores the scriptures in order to spin a good tale.

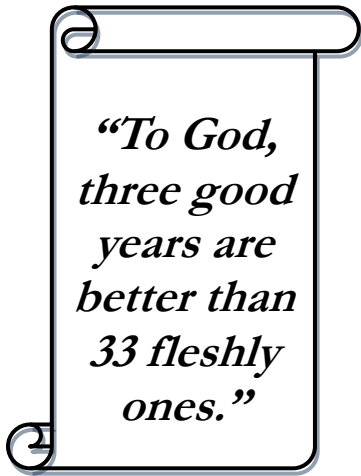
Judging By Principle And Not Speculation

But while we do not have a written record of the events of that silent time period, we can conclude certain things based on spiritual principle. These conclusions should not include specific tales of events but broad principles by which Jesus Christ always lived His life during the times we do have an account. One of the main principles by which His life was ordered was the principle of the dying seed. This principle is described in John 12:24. *“Except a corn of wheat (a seed) fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it brings forth much fruit.”*

According to this principle, in order to become fruitful, every seed must be hidden away for a period of time. The assurance concerning fruitfulness is that, if this putting away of the seed takes place, eventually power and abundance will come forth by resurrection. In other words, no fruitful tree ever became so just as the result of a spontaneous act of God or itself. It had to enter a time of silence and of being hidden from the eyes of men. I believe that

this principle is what explains the fact of the silent years of Jesus' life. Like a seed, Jesus was hid in the ground of earth existence, waiting to burst forth. When Jesus finally came forth in power at age thirty (Luke 3:23), it was not because of the anointing but because of death to self for 18 years.

The Bible declares that from His birth, Jesus began to grow in wisdom and understanding (Luke 2:42). For those who have ever experienced "silent years", you know that there are certain preparations that must take place within. One of those is that, during that time, you learn to say "no" as well as "yes". What I mean is that you learn to say no to your own wisdom and abilities while you learn to be hid -- not just in the earth but in the Father. When you take the yoke upon you, it halts any progress or any breaking forth of your own good ideas or plans (Mat. 11:29). Your impulsive reactions are not helpful and are only seen as resistance (that is what it is to God) -- not good works -- that leads to chaffing while yoked to Jesus. You are yoked to Him, not to the need (John 5:30). In order to remedy the impulsive nature of youth or zeal, God may bring you into some silent years. During those silent years you may wonder why you seem to keep being held back by God and others. You may tend to resist the process of being yoked together with Jesus and held at a slower pace. Altogether Jesus spent about thirty years in silence and being hidden from view yet He had only three and a half years of powerful ministry. The purpose of the silent years is to prepare you for the three. To God, three good years are better than 33 fleshly ones.



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Are The Silent Years Important?

To scholars or Christians who have never experienced them, the silent years of Jesus or of others would be viewed as uneventful and time that passed like a vapor. The thinking is that, if there is no written record of that time period then, they must not have much meaning to us. But those years were most important. During those years we are not released to ministry. We have no authority or power in matters of injustice or abuse. But though we have no position to deal with such things we are still confronted with circumstances that animate our judgments and reactions. Our particular reaction shows if we are getting close to being released for the ministry or are still responding as an infant. We react overtly to life's situations and crises. If we respond negatively, it will show us what we are apart from Life. If our reaction is Christ then we manifest what we are by union. The silent years are usually a time where we learn submission and obedience through the things we suffer. Submission to the Father is more than just blind obedience -- it is yieldedness to His Life within.

The Father's business involves more than His ministry and His "Company business affairs" (Luke 2:49). God's business is to live in His people. He has no greater business than to manifest through them. To be involved with the Father's business requires a

separating from the business of man unto the Father. It is separation from the affairs of this life to the affairs of LIFE.

So the silent years are more for personal growth than for outward ministry. The Bible clearly states that Jesus grew in wisdom and favor with God and man (Luke 2:52). It also says that He learned. He learned obedience from the things He suffered. Just like a seed beginning its growth by shooting roots downward instead of shooting branches outwardly, so Jesus did not demonstrate much outwardly during those quiet years.

Jesus Was John The Baptist's Cousin

John the Baptist was Jesus' cousin (Luke 1:36). Family relationships were a big thing in Jewish society therefore, as children, they grew up together and spent time together. But John states that he did not know who the Messiah was until he saw the dove descend on Jesus at His baptism. John never saw the clues. What are we to conclude from this? Are we to conclude that John, though filled with the Spirit from birth was basically blind to who was before him during those silent years (Luke 1:41)? Or maybe we are to conclude that it was not the years that were silent but Jesus was silent.

John was Jesus' relative. He knew Him the way many know Him today -- after the flesh. But on the day of Jesus' baptism, John knew Him, not as a cousin but revealed by the Spirit. With all his knowing of Jesus, John still had no clue who He was except in relation with being part of the same family. John said, "I knew Him not" (John 1:31). Jesus never gave John a clue before hand. He was silent, waiting for the Spirit to identify Him to the few that would receive it. As far as Jesus was concerned, the silent years would continue until God broke the silence. It was the Spirit that declared Jesus and if not -- He never would have spoken. John would never discover all that was true of Jesus without the Spirit, for Jesus was silent. What was hidden was wrapped in human flesh. Because Jesus never gave his cousin a clue, John did not pre-suppose anyone as the Messiah. John's words of declaration concerning Jesus were ONLY based on what the Spirit pointed out to him (John 3:16-17). To the Baptist, it would not have mattered who stepped out into the Jordan as long as the Spirit came on Him.

Many today know their family members after flesh and blood and might reject what does not appear to be Christ IN THEM. But John learned to live this way from the womb. When Mary entered the room and John leaped in his mother's womb, he could not see Mary or Jesus (Luke 1:41). John leaped in his mother's womb because the Spirit probably leaped in John. No wonder John did not know that his own cousin was the Promised One. There was no angel choir about Him or halo on Jesus. Jesus was no different from anyone else till the Spirit identified Him. Until that time, Jesus would remain silent.

Jesus Was Silent

In what way was Jesus silent? We hear no stories of how responsible, powerful, or generous Jesus was as a youth. James and Jude, the writers of the New Testament books bearing their names, were Jesus' brothers and yet they give us no stories concerning His life during the silent years. Surely if Jesus was doing remarkable things or showed impressive compassion or extraordinary responsibility, they would have told us concerning it. It was not until around the time of His death and resurrection that even His brothers began to comprehend whom Jesus was. Their childhood together offered no clues. They were unaware because Jesus, who He truly was, was silent and hidden.

Some would like us to believe that during His silent years Jesus demonstrated clear acts that identified Him as a very righteous young man as opposed to the actions of His brothers or other children His age. But He was not known as an example to all of the other children in Nazareth. He did not have a clean-cut image or a hippie image. He fit in and was probably rather ordinary looking. Even after the silent years had ended, Jesus had to be pointed out by Judas in order for the guards to pick Him out of the crowd (Mat. 26:48).

The town's folk had no stories of how He loved the oppressed or helped the outcast. We have no examples of how He championed their cause. In fact it seems He championed no one's cause -- not even God's. He was neither a champion nor a failure. He was not like Robin Hood or the Lone Ranger who helped people and then disappeared. He did not seem to be known for being kind or mean. The purpose for this time period was not to accomplish great things. His silent years were just that -- silent.

The big testimony we get from the scriptures concerning His life in Nazareth was not that He was a righteous man or one you did not trifle with, but that He was a carpenter's son. That's all! Other than this, nothing spectacular is communicated. Though Jesus grew in favor, from the accounts we have concerning Him, Jesus was neither hated nor honored above all others (Luke 2:52).

The Villagers View Of Jesus

The response to Jesus' new ministry seemed to evoke no emotional response from the people of Nazareth, only as an occupational image, which related to Him being a carpenter's son. And even in that, the carpenter is more seen and identified than the son. In fact He was not even known as a Master Carpenter but the son of a carpenter. Even His carpentry was not spectacular. Even so, He was not known for laughing or weeping. He was not known as the weeping carpenter. Throughout the whole of His silent years we have nothing reported about His eyes or smile.

Those of His own village did not seem to show a great respect for Jesus or respond as if all assumed this young man would turn out to be a great minister of God based on what they had observed during His childhood. He was not known as being religiously superior or anti-

religious. He was not reported to be argumentative or super friendly. Nothing in terms of being a special child of God was evident. In fact, the people of Nazareth were shocked by His movement into the things of God and said, *"From where does this man have these things"* (Mat. 13:55-56). In their eyes, it was not a gradual maturity but as if all of the sudden He appeared out of nowhere, but we know better. It was as if He was barely known, even to

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the people of His own little town. When speaking of Jesus they simply said, *"Are not his brothers and sisters among us?"* (Mat. 13:54-56). He seemed to be just one of the crowd. It does not seem that, before the beginning of His public ministry, any one wanted to get near Him or hear His words.

We have stories concerning how Saint Francis of Assisi was a friend to animals. Since Jesus was greater than Saint Francis, some would like to believe stories pertaining to all the animals following and obeying young Jesus. However, Jesus was no Beast-Master that commanded and communed with the animals. He was a boy in hiding and in preparation.

Jesus Submitted To His Parents And To The Synagogue

We have spoken much about what is not recorded in the Bible concerning Jesus' life during the silent years. We have also commented on the speculations of man about what might have happened. None of this is valid without specific proof. However, there are some facts that we do know from the Bible that took place during those silent years. We are given the record that Jesus submitted to His parents (Luke 2:51). We also know from the way the scriptures are worded that Jesus went to the synagogue every Sabbath. That means that for thirty years He sat and listened to wrong interpretations of the scriptures and of misrepresentations concerning the heart of His very own Father (Luke 4: 16-30). Amazingly, He did this consistently with no bad attitude or outbursts. Those years of obscurity are meant to work certain attitudes and viewpoints into us. They are very valuable to the future minister who will face many unfair situations and scandals of religion. There would come a day when He would drive out the moneychangers from the temple but not during the silent years.

"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven" (Eccl. 3:1).

How frustrating it must have been for Jesus during that period. However, anyone can identify problems in the church and react. To drive out the moneychangers must be done in order to fill the temple with His life and nature but He must first learn not to just react or carry God' work out with mixed motives. What was deep inside the heart of Jesus was to glorify the Father but silence was needed during His days in the synagogue of Nazareth in order to prepare Him.

We too need a time of preparation. Before we are given the power to act, we must first learn to be still and know that God is in control. He does not need us to fix all problems. What He needs is for us to be “after His kind” (Gen. 2:18). Are you first under control before you try to correct what you see is out of control and out of order? Jesus did not move for thirty years but when the Father finally said “move”, He moved. In our flesh, everything in you says “move” based on the need or the injustice but we must learn to wait upon the Lord. Belief does not need to make haste and prove itself by great acts (Isa. 28:11). Jesus learned to listen to God and to only do what He saw the Father doing (John 5:19). This was not an easy thing for One so full of compassion that also had the power to enact change.

Imagine the Son of God having all power at His disposal yet He does nothing on a supernatural basis for others. He became like you and me – a man. He became helpless toward need. During those silent years, lepers passed by unhealed. Some died before Jesus turned thirty years of age. It was thirty years of burial -- being hid. He gave forth no glorious displays of supernatural power nor sent forth any scathing rebukes for the perverted religious system that was all around Him. God had not released Him forth yet, therefore He must remain silent, regardless of the need or the problems. Need is not God. Power is not God. The Son of man must learn to function based on the Father and not based on His own perceptions.

The Consequences Of Being Silent

Can you imagine the shame and guilt He must have felt? What would people think later when they find out that He could have intervened in hundreds of situations during those thirty years? But forget about other people’s reactions – what about yourself? How can you live with yourself when you watch people suffer, knowing you could intervene but not doing so? Not only did He function this way toward strangers in the synagogue but toward His own family and even toward His own needs (Mat. 8:20). Through His incarnation, He passed from incredible glory to extreme poverty. He and His family lived in poverty yet He did nothing about it. Though He had the power, He was not constantly stretching forth His hand and relieving His family of health issues or financial deficits. He truly made Himself into a poor man. These are things that only the silent years can deal with in a proper way.

When Jesus finally began His ministry, He went first to the synagogue at Nazareth. The Bible says, “as was his custom” (Luke 4:16). The biblical account notes that He always went to the synagogue in Nazareth but, though He did that for thirty years, it was only after the silent years were ended that He was noticed. Every other trip there was veiled with complete silence -- no record. There are no accounts of Jesus ever speaking during the silent years to encourage those who looked for a new break through or who were hurting. Once the silent years ended, He finally did speak but it was not with words of rebuke for all the wrong teachings He had endured during His childhood. Instead, He found a place in the

Bible with a God-given view of Himself. When the book was finally handed to Jesus to comment on, He opened the book (Rev. 5). When He finished, He closed the book and handed it back to the minister. He opens it, and when it is not in His hand and out of his mouth -- it is closed. The day the silent years ended in Nazareth, it was the time to open the closed book (Luke 4:18-21). The result was that God Himself illuminated the book to the hearers.

Sometimes it takes more power to be silent than to speak or act. During those silent years, Jesus was endued with all the power of the heavens -- BUT SILENT. At the same moment that He was powerful, He was also self-limiting. We see this in the example of Jesus washing the disciple's feet (John 13:5). He girded Himself for the task and that is what we must be willing to do also. It takes many years of preparation to come to such a place. If we do not properly go through our silent years, we will eventually miserably fail.

*"For ye are dead, and your life is hid
with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3).*

Our problem is that we want power more than we see the value of being hidden. We want to fix things, make things more efficient, and get things done. We miss the real issue. Almighty God could be unhindered in His ability to remedy problems, chase off the devil, or order things more efficiently, if that was His goal. For Him, the problems do not lie outwardly but inwardly -- within the heart of His own. His work in us is not to make us more powerful to handle issues or to make us all knowing so as to more effectively order the things of the earth.

Becoming The Least

God wants us to be emptied -- then He will fill us up. We are made to be Jesus' branches (John 15:5). Our goal should not be to become more discerning but to function more as a branch. *"He must increase and we must decrease"* (John 3:30). To God, the least is the greatest. *"Not a man born of a woman who is greater than John but he that is least in the kingdom is greater than all"* (Luke 7:28). Those who are most hidden (least) are the greatest with God. The word "least" does not mean lacking or nothing but refers to those who are the most hidden. Hidden is not an emphasis on lack or nothingness but hid. You are unaware of one who is least. You are not aware of humility or brokenness but of Another. We must learn the lessons of being "hid". It is not just about using or having power but about being attuned to the Father. "Man shall not live by bread alone..." (Mat. 4:4).

You learn that if the Father wants silence then He gets it. If He wants you to pass through a crowd of infirmed people but tells you to only heal one person, then you do it (John 5). You are becoming a channel. Instead of seeking God to give you wisdom in every situation, He becomes your wisdom (I Cor. 1:30). What this means is that, you no longer have to get explanations from Him concerning why you withhold or act -- His wisdom is enough and you trust His judgments. If the actions (or lack of actions) He directs you into

cause others to attribute things to you that are not true then so be it. Your whole focus is to carry out what you see and hear from God.

God brings us into silent years to work just such things into us. We learn to live by the life, will, word and direction of Another. By the time He releases us into ministry, relating in this way to God needs to be second nature. God takes what is new to us and makes it actions, then habit, then lifestyle with the ultimate result that it becomes nature. This is why it may take thirty years just to bring about three good years.

Again, we see this to be the case with Moses. We know from the Book of Hebrews that he was ready to forsake his Egyptian rights as “son of Pharaoh’s daughter” and lead God’s people out with a mighty hand. Such displays are common among those who have never been “hid”. Instead of showing the whole world his great commitment to God and a great deliverance for God’s people, Moses went out into a barren wilderness alone.

As far as Egypt could discern, Moses was dead. After forty years, Moses became dead in his own eyes also. Clearly they were silent years where no record is given concerning daily events. Only when the silent years ended do we have the record concerning the events that took place at the burning bush.

Not Confined To A One-Time Period

This fact of entering into obscurity is not just confined to a one-time period in life. Though both David and Jesus had whole years where they were hidden away, they both also had short term experiences where they had to embrace it.

This can be seen in these men’s relationship to a certain brook – the brook Kidron. The word “Kidron” means obscurity, black, sad. This definition is not just a random thing for the experiences both of Jesus and David concerning dark times of rejection and obscurity also involved their passing over the brook Kidron.

We find that as Jesus headed toward Gethsemane that He and His disciples passed over this brook. *“When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Kidron, where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples”* (John 18:1). This verse is sandwiched between the heart-felt prayer of Jesus in John 17 and the heart-wrenching events concerning the garden of Gethsemane.

David and his men also passed over Kidron on the way into the wilderness when driven out into obscurity by Absalom’s conspiracy. The king knew what it was that he faced as he left Jerusalem for he had been driven out by King Saul many years earlier. He tried to turn people back from following him into darkness and aloneness. Ittai, the Gittite considered that being with his lord in obscurity and the prospect of facing silent years was better than living in popularity away from him. We find the story in II Samuel 15:17-23:

“And the king went forth, and all the people after him, and tarried in a place that was far off. And all his servants passed on beside him; and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites, six hundred men which came after him from Gath, passed on before the king. Then said the king to Ittai the Gittite, Wherefore goest thou also with us? return to thy place, and abide with the king: for thou art a stranger, and also an exile. Whereas thou camest but yesterday, should I this day make thee go up and down with us? seeing I go whither I may, return thou, and take back thy brethren: mercy and truth be with thee. And Ittai answered the king, and said, As the LORD liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be. And David said to Ittai, Go and pass over. And Ittai the Gittite passed over, and all his men, and all the little ones that were with him. And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over: the king also himself passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over, toward the way of the wilderness”.

The Need For Roots

Because the silent years are hidden from human eyes, there is the assumption that nothing happens during that period. But a tree spends much of its early history developing roots, having no manifestation of fruit. One passing by, or even the tree itself may not be aware of how much is taking place in silence. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus gave an example of those who show all the outward signs of phenomenal growth but they eventually wither away or are burned up. Few want to accept the place of obscurity for a while so that they might drink up the rain of heaven. They are unaware that the sustaining of life is not found in the quantity of fruit but in the depth of the roots. The hidden life is most valuable though unseen. If the carnal mind is given its place, we will follow its dictates and never embrace obscurity. The seed will be “of God” but it will press upwards first, into the open air and sunlight, instead of downward.

The silent years will last until we have seen the great value of not being seen. They remain until the struggle ends and quietness and contentment have settled over us. Interestingly enough, it was when that point was reached in the life of Moses that God appeared and wanted to bring him forward. Now, the struggle goes back to the other way! Now Moses does not want to leave the place of hidden silence. He does not shoot forth like a bull out of a stall; God has to coax him out.

Who can express the infinite benefit of the silent years? No wonder there is no record of those years. Words are not adequate to express what God accomplishes on the back side of the desert.

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be

recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.”

(Romans 11:33-36)

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