

To Speak or Not To Speak

Why does Jesus sometimes command silence?

Sometimes, Jesus helps someone and says, "Tell your friends how much the Lord has done for you" (Mark 5:19). Other times, He sternly warns against saying anything (Matt. 9:30). How do we understand these different commands?

When Jesus commands silence, it is not meant to be permanent or to keep people in the dark indefinitely. Everything would eventually be revealed. In Matthew 8, people likely noticed the cleansed leper on his way to the temple with his sacrifice, and the priest undoubtedly knew of his cleansing. The prohibition would be lifted following his offering, but obedience to God is the highest priority. Atoning for his sin trumped attesting to miracles. (Remember, Jesus' ministry happened under the Old Covenant. The New Covenant wasn't effected until Jesus ratified it with His blood.)

Second, Jesus' commands fit the circumstances. Jesus knew men's hearts. He knew how accurately or fanatically one would recount His miraculous ministry. This is precisely why He prohibited demons from testifying about Him. Satan always mixes lies with the truth.

Third, the Messianic concept was associated with a political agenda, and a preemptive proclamation of His true identity could spark an uprising for liberation under Roman oppression.

Fourth, Jesus always accounted for the affected person's spiritual condition. Even in God's blessings, there is a temptation for selfish glory. "See what God did for me!" There's a fine line between humble adoration and selfish acclamation. If the people weren't ready to hear or the person wasn't humble enough to glorify God, silence would be preferred.

Above all, His Messianic work always compelled His commands. Jesus said several times that His time or hour had not yet fully come. Jesus was on a divine schedule and would deny anything that hindered His mission. Jesus said, "Tell everyone" because it advanced His Messianic work. The same is true when He says, "Tell no one."

What does this mean for us today? Shall we refrain from proclaiming Christ at any time? Certainly not! The fullness of time has come. Jesus' Messianic work is done. Today is the day of salvation. We are the light of the world and the salt of the earth. Christ's enduring command to all believers is: "Proclaim the gospel the whole creation" (Mark 16:15). Let nothing hinder our offering God the sacrifice of praise. Amen.