

The Heart of the Gospel: Gethsemane to the Burial of Christ

Chapter 3: The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus Christ

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And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, "Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast." And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, "Hail, master;" and kissed him. And Jesus said unto him, "Friend, wherefore art thou come?" Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him. And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear. Then said Jesus unto him, "Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, "Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me. But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled. (Matthew 26:47-56)

Introduction

The betrayal and arrest of Jesus is a turning point in the passion narrative. Thus far, the gospel accounts have focused on the Savior as He interacts with the disciples: His concern for them, His attempt to prepare them for His suffering and their coming trials. The disciples are seen as unprepared, arrogant and irresponsible regarding what is about to happen to them. "From the moment of Judas' arrival at Gethsemane, the disciples fade out of the picture and before long are physically separated from Jesus for the rest of the story. The only exception is Peter, and his presence will be an embarrassment rather than a help to Jesus. From now on Jesus will be in the company not of his supporters, however unreliable, but of his enemies. And whereas hitherto it has been he who has taken the initiative in all that has been done and said, he becomes now the passive victim, his spoken words are few (though important); and his fate in the hands of others."¹ We have come to the point in the gospels where Christ is "betrayed into the hands of sinners" (Mk. 14:41).

As we turn our attention to the betrayal and arrest of our Lord, there are a number of important things to consider. We need to examine the conspiracy to kill Jesus. What are the events that lie behind the betrayal and arrest? Then, we will focus our attention on why the betrayal took place. Why in God's providence was the Messiah offered up in this particular manner?

¹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 590.

The Conspiracy

As we look at the conspiracy to kill Jesus, we need to look at both the Jewish leadership and Judas Iscariot.

(1) In our examination of the Jewish leadership we must discuss the dominant religious party in Israel and on the Sanhedrin—the Pharisees. This point is important because our Lord was arrested and put to death by the Jewish leadership primarily because of religious differences. It was Christ’s view of the law, of salvation and of Himself that caused the unbelieving Jews to intensely hate Him.

a) The Messiah was hated because He strictly held to *sola Scriptura* (the Bible alone) and emphatically rejected the oral law. A large part of the Sermon on the Mount deals with upholding the Old Testament moral law against the human additions or legalism of the Pharisees. “Jesus repudiates the perverse externalistic interpretations of the Pharisees, their exegetical distortions of the law, and their works-righteousness scheme of justification.”² Christ openly rebuked the Pharisees and Scribes for their false teaching. “He said to them, “All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition” (Mk. 7:9; cf. Mt. 15:3). Our Lord rebuked the Pharisaical perversion of the teaching on divorce (Mt. 5:19). “His teaching on divorce (Mt. 19:3-9) restricts divorce to the one cause of [sexual] immorality rather than allowing a multiplicity of grounds, some of them rather flimsy.”³ Jesus attacks the misuse of religious vows (*corban*) which was used by the Pharisees to avoid their biblical responsibilities to their aged parents. The Savior also came into a strong conflict with the Pharisees over the Sabbath. Our Lord upheld the biblical teaching on the Sabbath over against the legalistic accretions of His opponents. After Christ healed a man on the Sabbath, the Jews were so angry they wanted to kill Him. “For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him because He had done these things on the Sabbath” (Jn. 5:16).

If Jesus had merely disagreed with the religious leaders of His day over *some* of the oral law (*Halakah*), then He would have just started another corrupt Jewish sect and would have fit in with their religious worldview. But, His radical rejection of everything from the mind of man in doctrine, ethics and worship in favor of a strict Biblicism made Him an incredible threat to the whole religious and political structure in Israel. The religious leaders knew that if Jesus were accepted by the people they were finished. The Pharisees were concerned not with the teaching of Scripture, but with maintaining the status quo. They held a religious position which gave them the power in their communities. They were looked up to as teachers, as pious men, as maintainers of religious orthodoxy and they loved their position. “They use their socially accepted role as accurate interpreters of tradition to condemn Jesus according to the laws and customs which give the community its identity and shape.”⁴

b) Jesus was hated because He emphatically rejected the Pharisees’ doctrine of salvation by human merit. The Pharisees had externalized the law and set up a series of external rituals relating to cleanness that they believed resulted in true righteousness before God. But our Lord emphasized the impossibility of keeping the law by focusing on: the requirement for a perfect obedience in the heart of man (Mt. 5:22, 28); the inward corruption of the human heart (Mt.

² Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Nutley, NJ: The Craig Press, 1977), 89.

³ R. J. Wyatt, “Pharisees” in Gen. Ed., Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 3:828.

⁴ Anthony J. Saldarini, “Pharisees,” in Ed. in Chief, David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:298.

15:17-20); the necessity of the new birth before a man can see the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:3, 5, 7); the requirement of admitting our sin and guilt before God and confessing our sins (Mt. 9:12-13; Lu. 18:10) and the need to believe in Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Jn. 6:47; 8:24; 3:18). As long as the Pharisees depended on their own works and saw themselves as righteous before God they remained in their sins. Our Lord taught that the Pharisees were satisfied with cleaning the outside of the cup while inside they were filthy and corrupt (Mt. 23:27). They were white-washed tombs (Mt. 23:27); who rejected Moses and the prophets (Jn. 5:46; Mt. 23:31); who preached but did not practice (Mt. 23:3).

The Pharisees had set up a false religion based on human effort, pride and external ritual. Our Lord diametrically opposed the Pharisees' doctrine by teaching that we are sinners (Mt. 19:16); that our works merit nothing (Lk. 17:10); that our only hope of attaining eternal life is to believe in Christ. For this reason our Lord confronted the Pharisees head on with the truth of Scripture. "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins" (Jn. 8:24).

c) The Messiah was hated because of His unique claim of divine Sonship. "But Jesus answered them, 'My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.' Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God" (Jn. 5:17-18). "Then the Jews said to Him. 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?' Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.' Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple..." (Jn. 8:57-59). "'And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. *I and my Father are one.*' Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, 'Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?' The Jews answered him, saying, 'For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.' Jesus answered them... 'If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that *the Father is in me, and I in him.*' Therefore they sought again to take him: but he escaped out of their hand" (Jn. 10:28-39).

Although from the gospels it is clear that many of the Jewish people hated Christ and wanted Him dead (e.g., Jn. 7:20), in Scripture the expression "the Jews" often refers to the religious leaders. "Notice how in [John] 8:48 it is 'the Jews' who say to Christ 'Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a demon.' It was 'the Jews' who cast out of the synagogue the man born blind, whose eyes Christ had opened (9:22, 34). It was 'the Jews' who took up stones to stone Christ (10:31). It was 'the officers of the Jews' who 'took Jesus, and bound Him' (18:22). And it was through 'fear of the Jews' that Joseph of Arimathea came secretly to Pilate and begged the body of the Savior (19:38)...it was because of the Jews, who sought to kill Him, that Jesus would not walk in Judea, but remained in Galilee."⁵

If we look at the arrest and execution of the Messiah from the standpoint of secondary causes (i.e. in contrast to the divine decree that lies behind these events), we could make an excellent case that the unbelief of God's own covenant people, especially the religious leaders, led directly to the arrest and execution of the Messiah. The gospel says that our Lord was born of the virgin Mary. The Pharisees accused Jesus of being born as a result of sexual immorality (Jn. 8:41). The Bible says that the Savior was anointed with the Holy Spirit beyond measure (Mt.

⁵ Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, [1945] 1975), 1:370.

3:16; Mk. 1:10; Lk. 3:22). The Jews taught that He was demon-possessed (Jn. 8:48; cf. Jn. 7:20). The Scriptures say that Christ was born in Bethlehem (Mt. 2:1; Lk. 2:4). The Pharisees first taught that Jesus cannot be a true prophet because He was from Galilee (Jn. 7:41-41) and then in anger they accused the Son of God of being a Samaritan—a heretical half-breed (Jn. 8:48). The gospels teach that Jesus was perfectly sinless, in thought, word and deed (Jn. 8:46; 18:38; Lk. 23:4, 41, 47). But the Pharisees claimed that Jesus was a Sabbath breaker (Jn. 5:18) and a sinner. God’s Word teaches that the Messiah is God’s Son, of the same essence with the Father, equal in power and glory with Him. The Jews claimed that this teaching was blasphemy (Jn. 8:59; 10:28-39). And, it is Jesus’ claim to be God’s only unique Son that was the official reason given by the Jews for His conviction on the charges of blasphemy (Mk. 14:62-65; Mt. 26:64-66). Further, the religious leaders excommunicated from the synagogues anyone who professed faith in Christ (Jn. 9:22). Therefore, the conspiracy to kill the Messiah grew directly out of the bitter soil of unbelief.

Although the Jewish leaders wanted Jesus arrested and taken into custody for quite some time (e.g., Jn. 7:45 reads, “Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, ‘Why have you [the temple guards or police] not brought Him?’”), the decision by the whole council to finally take decisive action occurs soon after the resurrection of Lazarus. “Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him. But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, ‘What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation’.... Then from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death” (Jn. 11:45-48, 53). “Among the Pharisees as a party the death of Christ had been long decided on, ch. v. 16, 18, vii. 1, 19, 25, viii. 37; but the council itself only now adopted that resolution, and from this time onward plotted for its accomplishment.”⁶

The council that made the decision to murder the Prince of Life was composed of the “chief priests” (i.e. ex-high priests and members of high priestly families), most of whom were probably Sadducees (the high priest certainly was, see Acts 5:17). The Sadducees were the liberals of their day. They denied the authority of the writings and the prophets; the resurrection from the dead and the life hereafter. The Pharisees on the Sanhedrin were mostly scribes. “The two rival sects hated each other bitterly, yet in this evil work or persecuting the Lord Jesus, they buried their differences, and eagerly joined together in their common crime.”⁷ What is particularly shocking regarding their reasoning about why Jesus must die is the pure selfishness involved. The council members were not really concerned about the people or the nation but their own position of privilege: “Observe, however, what it was that they feared (v. 49): not that ‘the Romans will come and *destroy* both our holy place and nation...rather it was that ‘the Romans will come and *take away from us* both the place and the nation.’”⁸

Prior to this plan to have Christ executed, the Jewish leadership, with the Pharisees and scribes taking the lead role, sought to counteract the ministry of Jesus by lying to the people about who He was and what He taught, by excommunicating and persecuting His followers and by attempting to entrap Him in teaching that contradicted Moses or that would place Him in trouble with the Roman state (Mt. 22:21; Mk. 12:16; Lk. 20-24). The problem that the leadership

⁶ E. W. Hengstenberg, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John* (Minneapolis, MN: Klock & Klock, [1865] 1980), 2:74.

⁷ Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, 2:213.

⁸ George Beasley-Murray, *John* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 196.

could not deal with was the amazing signs the Savior did. The miracles of our Lord, especially recent events near Jerusalem (the man born blind, Jn. 9; and, the raising of Lazarus, Jn. 11), precipitated the conspiracy to kill the Messiah.

Other factors that influenced the decision of the Jewish leaders were envy toward Jesus and false concepts of a political Messiah. “For he [Pilate] knew that they had handed Him over because of envy” (Mt. 27:18; Mk. 15:10). They despised the Messiah because of His growing popularity with the people, His ability to teach with authority and His ability to perform amazing miracles. The Savior was genuine while they were hypocrites and, deep down, they knew it. Further, like virtually all the Jews at that time, they believed that the claim of being the Messiah involved a political takeover and a revolution against Rome. If Jesus became too popular, their jobs and perhaps even their lives were at stake. Therefore, they reasoned that it was better that this “pretender” die, perhaps even unjustly, than take the chance of a confrontation with the Roman state.

As we look at the events that led up to the arrest of Christ it is important to note that Jesus was in complete control of everything that occurred. Nothing took Him by surprise. As high priest of the order of Melchizedek responsible for the sacrifice of Himself, He orchestrated the events that led to His betrayal, arrest and execution. “Clearly when Jesus came up to Bethany from Jericho, as He did on the preceding Friday, and then raised Lazarus, he precipitated the final decision of the leaders to have him killed. He did so knowingly. When he rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, he carried the confrontation a step farther. When he cleansed the temple, as the synoptic Gospels record (Matt. 21:12-17; Mk. 1:15-18; Luke 19:45-47; cf. John 2:13-16 for an earlier incident), he further intensified the leaders’ ire.”⁹ At the Lord’s supper he sent out Judas on His errand of betrayal. And, He sat in the Garden waiting to be arrested.

(2) Although the Jewish leadership was arrayed against Christ throughout His ministry, Judas Iscariot’s role appears only in the last week of our Lord’s life before the crucifixion. The event that sets Judas into motion occurs on the previous Tuesday. It was on this day that Mary anointed the Savior with a very expensive perfumed ointment (“spikenard”). This wonderful act of devotion caused the disciples to be indignant at Mary (Mk. 14:4; Mt. 26:8). Mark tells us “they criticized her sharply” (14:5). Judas Iscariot, the treasurer for the disciples, voiced the strongest objection saying: “this ointment could have been sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor.” (Jn. 12:5). John’s account tells us that Judas didn’t really care about the poor—he was a thief who was helping himself to the money bag (see Jn. 12:6). Luke says that after Judas became angry with Jesus that Satan entered him (22:3). Satan “is said to *enter* into the reprobate, when he takes possession of all their senses, overthrows the fear of God, extinguishes the light of reason, and destroys every feeling of shame. This extremity of vengeance God does not execute on any but those already devoted to destruction.”¹⁰

Then, only one day after the chief priests, the scribes and the elders of the people “plotted to take Jesus by trickery and kill Him” (Mt. 26:4), Judas approached the chief priests and the captains of the temple guard to inquire how he might deliver Jesus to them (Lk. 2:4; Mk. 14:10). The high priests, who were surprised and delighted with this turn of events, promised Judas a reward for his services. When Judas agreed, they weighed out thirty pieces of silver (Mk. 14:11; Mt. 26:15; Lk. 22:5-6). From that time on, Judas “sought opportunity to betray Him to them in the absence of the multitude” (Lk. 22:6; cf. Mk. 14:11; Mt. 26:16).

⁹ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 5:1376.

¹⁰ John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, 3:193.

A few days later at the last Passover meal Jesus informs the disciples that one of the twelve will betray Him. The apostle John leans back and asks the Lord, “Who is it?” (Jn. 13:25). Christ tells John privately, “It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it” (Jn. 13:26). In Matthew’s account Judas asks, “Rabbi, is it I?” (26:25) and receives the answer, “You have said it” (26:25). After our Lord hands the dipped morsel to Judas, “Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, ‘What you do, do quickly’” (Jn. 13:27). “So the final gesture of affection precipitates the final surrender of Judas to the power of darkness.”¹¹ Christ, as the Master of His own destiny, tells Judas to hurry up and set the events for His arrest in motion. “All the details of his Passion, including the time-schedule, were in *his own* hands, not in the hands of the traitor. In the plan of God it had been decided that the Son of God would make himself an offering for sin by his death on the cross, and *that this would happen on Friday, the fifteenth of Nisan*. That was not the moment which had been selected by the Sanhedrin or by Judas. Hence, Judas must work *faster*. And Judas *does* work faster, probably because he now knew (Mt. 26:25) that he had been ‘discovered.’ He was probably afraid lest the whole plot would fail if he did not act quickly.”¹²

The Purpose of the Betrayal and Arrest in Redemptive History

While the Bible is very clear regarding why the Son of God had to die a sacrificial death, many believers have not considered why our Savior was delivered up in this particular manner. Therefore, we will consider why the betrayal and arrest occurred the way it did. There are a number of areas that we need to consider.

(1) The betrayal and arrest occurred as it did in God’s plan to show that Jesus voluntarily offered Himself up, that He was in control of His own arrest. This point is proven by looking at the various options for the taking of the Savior into custody. If Christ hid from His foes, tried to escape or even allowed His disciples to fight in His defense, then He would have appeared as an unwilling victim as He went to the cross. When Peter drew his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest’s servant, Jesus healed him and told the disciples He could summon twelve legions of angels in an instant (Mt. 26:51-53). “So Jesus said to Peter, ‘Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?’” (Jn. 18:11).

Also, why did our Lord not simply walk to the temple and turn Himself in to the authorities? One reason is that He was not guilty of any sin or crime and thus it would be improper for Him to act as though He were guilty of a crime. Further, it was necessary for the authorities to persecute the Messiah in this manner in order for the covenant nation’s sin to reach its culminating point of infamy before God. If the Savior had turned Himself in, the Jewish leaders would not have been forced to treat their Messiah in such an evil, humiliating manner. Our Lord said, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.’ Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are the sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers’ guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered

¹¹ Newbigin as quoted in, George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 239.

¹² William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), 248.

between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation” (Mt. 23:29-36).

God, the great owner of the vineyard, had sent many servants to His covenant people, but they (the vinedressers) beat some, stoned and even killed others. “Then last of all he sent His own son to them.... So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him” (Mt. 21:37, 39). The persecution, humiliation and murder of the Prince of Peace were the extreme of wickedness and guilt. God, by these providential events, was filling the cup of wrath of His apostate people. When men abused and murdered the Author of life—the sinless, holy, harmless, loving, Son of God—sin and apostasy reached its climax. The betrayal and arrest of Jesus was necessary as a display of the wickedness, hatred and sinfulness of man, in particular the Jewish authorities and their followers. Apart from God’s grace, men are so wicked, foul, and black that they passionately hate God’s beloved Son. “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil” (Jn. 3:19).

(2) The betrayal and arrest were necessary as an aspect of our Lord’s humiliation. In fact, virtually every historical event associated with the betrayal and arrest were sore blows upon the heart of the Savior. He was handed over by treachery, abandoned by His disciples and turned over to the most corrupt group to walk the face of the earth. “There must be nothing consolatory in it; pains must be taken to pour into it all that even Divine wisdom can invent of awful and of unheard woe, and this one point—‘He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me,’ [Ps. 41:9] was absolutely necessary to intensify the bitterness.”¹³ There are a number of things to note regarding the humiliation of our Lord in these events.

a) He was betrayed by “one of the twelve” (Mk. 14:43; Mt. 26:47; Lk. 22:47). The phrase “one of the twelve” reveals the tragedy of this event. “The horror of this act from the perspective of Jesus’ movement lay in the fact that the Twelve represented a repentant and restored Israel, the foundation for a new beginning. Jesus had appointed the twelve, entrusted his message of the kingdom to them, empowered them to do his work of healing and exorcism (3:13-19; 6:7-13), and promised them positions of authority in the coming kingdom (by inference in 10:40-45; explicitly in Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:28-30). Judas’ betrayal constituted much more than simply the perfidy [faithlessness or treachery] of one who had previously professed loyalty and commitment to the cause.”¹⁴ Judas betrayed the Son of God, the covenant God of Israel and the Head of a new redeemed humanity. Judas betrayed not only Christ as his teacher, friend, companion and Lord, but also everything that Jesus stood for. Since Judas was “one of the twelve,” “it would be impossible to mention all the privileges that had been bestowed upon him during the many days, weeks, and months he had spent in Christ’s immediate company.”¹⁵

Because Judas was “one of the twelve” or part of this very small select group, the people of Israel would have looked upon him as not just a partner but almost as a son to our Lord. The ancient Rabbi-disciple relationship was more like a family than the social connection between teachers and students today. For over three years Judas ate with the Savior, lodged with Him, listened to every inspired Word, watched the Master’s amazing love and compassion and beheld one astounding miracle after another. Because of his unique position and relationship to the Mediator, Judas’ name was associated with that of Jesus. When he betrayed the Lord, the angels

¹³ Charles H. Spurgeon, “The Betrayal” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1969), 9:87.

¹⁴ Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 422.

¹⁵ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 922.

in heaven must have gasped while tongues on earth wagged. What treachery! Only a man completely given over to Satan could do such a thing.

Judas was not only an apostle, but was also treated with the utmost confidence as the treasurer of the disciples. This proves that he had the full trust of the other apostles. He had been thoroughly trusted as the keeper of the money bag. There is never even a hint in any of the gospel accounts that his character had been questioned. At the holy supper, when our Lord revealed that one of the twelve was a traitor, no one suspected Judas. They were wondering about themselves. They asked, "Lord, is it I?" Outwardly, until this time Judas appeared above reproach. As one of the twelve, he was probably admired by believers throughout Judea. Yet, inwardly he was a wolf ready to strike at the good Shepherd. For over three years, all the tithes that were collected were given to Judas who, at the direction of Jesus, would have bought supplies and helped the poor. Think of the scandal to Christ's cause to find the purse-bearer of the Master to be no better than a thief and a traitor. The infamy of Judas' sin and the humiliation of the Savior were increased by the traitor's important position. The sinless Son of God's treasurer was a man-devil, a follower of Satan. To be chosen to such a high position and then to become a conspirator with the corrupt, wicked high priests and Pharisees was treason to the utmost degree.

Judas ought to be a warning to every one of us regarding the dangers of self-deception, secret cherished sins and hypocrisy. Judas was an ordained minister of the gospel. As Peter said of him, "he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry" (Ac. 1:17). He was even sent out to cast out demons and heal the sick. For a time he had a position of great honor in the church. Yet, through all this he was never a true child of God. He was never regenerated; he never received the Holy Spirit and never had true saving faith. We know that, as treasurer, Judas was secretly stealing from the tithe box. Judas had an unrepentant heart. How did he justify his sin? How did he reconcile his behavior with his profession? How did he deceive himself for so long? Perhaps he took comfort in his position as a church officer. Perhaps he ignored his sin because he was doing so many good works for the Master.

Oh, dear Christian, examine yourself to see if you are harboring a spirit of Judas in your heart. Remember, there are many ministers, elders and deacons in the pit of hell. There will be multitudes of professing Christians who will be in a state of total shock on the day of judgment. Beloved, don't make excuses for secret sins, but rather forsake them at once. Don't convince yourself that you are faithful when you know deep down that you are not. Don't depend on your reputation or your outward good deeds, when you know you are living obstinately in sin. Also, we must not make excuses for our spouses, our children and our friends when we see hypocrisy in their lives. To ignore their hypocrisy is to help them slide into the lake of fire. Judas was a member of the visible church who was well known and respected throughout Judea by the disciples, yet he was rotten to the core. No one but Jesus, who according to His divine nature was omniscient, had even a clue of his black heart. Given all this, we must be extra diligent in self-examination. We must be honest with ourselves and pray that God would open our eyes to any hypocrisy. The disciples saw in Judas a pious saint, when all the while he was a devilish, foul apostate.

b) Christ was betrayed with a kiss. When Judas plotted with the authorities to betray the Messiah he came up with the signal for identifying Jesus. "Judas is the author of this 'signal.' A devilish refinement distinguishes it."¹⁶ Although it was a full moon that night, the authorities wanted to make sure they got the right man. Judas wanted to make sure he made good on his

¹⁶ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, [1946] 1961), 646.

wicked agreement. Since it was customary at that time for a disciple to greet his Rabbi with a kiss, this method was chosen probably because it would identify Christ without arousing any suspicion.

What is particularly treacherous about the use of a kiss to betray the Lord is that a kiss is a symbol of loyalty, friendship and affection. What should have been a badge of faithfulness became a sign of treachery. What is particularly sickening about this black deed is that Judas embraced and kissed the Savior in a very friendly manner. The verb for kiss (Gk. *katphilein*) is an intensive form of the verb *philein* indicating a fond, affectionate kiss. It was a kiss of mockery, impertinence and hatred disguised as an act of love and friendship. The symbol for love, communion, loyalty, friendship and family was turned into an instrument of hatred, disloyalty, destruction and death. “For a Rabbi’s disciple to *kiss* his master (on hand or foot) was not an everyday greeting, but a mark of special honour. Nor dare the disciple take this initiative uninvited; to do so was a ‘studied insult’ (AB, p. 329). The greeting of Jesus as *Rabbi* in this context is therefore heavily ironical (see on v. 25, the only other use of this address in Matthew, again by Judas). Judas’ action thus not only identifies Jesus to the arresting party, but marks his own public repudiation of Jesus’ authority.”¹⁷

Submitting to this great indignity and humiliation, our Lord retained His composure and responded: “Friend, why have you come?” (Mt. 26:50)? That Christ knew the great treachery of Judas’ deed is relayed in Luke’s account where our Lord says, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?” (22:48). The first word the Savior spoke to Judas was “friend.” What a gentle and kind response to such treason. Our Lord’s words in response to the kiss flowed from a pierced heart. They are a reproof of great disappointment and sadness. Would not the term friend remind Judas of the years of friendship and fellowship they had together? Were they not table companions only hours earlier? “‘Must the Son of man be betrayed by one of His own disciples, as if He had been a hard Master, or deserved ill at their hands? Must the badge of friendship be the instrument of treachery?’ To *betray*, is bad enough; to *betray the Son of man* is worse; to betray Him *with a kiss*, is worst of all.”¹⁸ “‘Betrayest thou,’ my Judas, my treasurer, ‘betrayest thou *the Son of Man*,’ thy suffering, sorrowing friend, whom thou hast seen naked and poor, and without a place whereon to lay his head. Betrayest thou *the Son of Man*—and dost thou prostitute the fondest of all endearing signs—a kiss—that which should be a symbol of loyalty to the King, shall it be a badge of thy treachery?’”¹⁹

That Judas did not immediately fall to his knees before Jesus and beg for forgiveness with tears demonstrates that his heart was like stone. His black granite heart had been fully given over to the prince of darkness. Even though our Lord knew that Judas was fulfilling the divine decree; that the events that were occurring had to take place; and, that Judas would never repent, but would go out and hang himself, He still warned Judas and treated Him with a kindness he did not deserve. May God enable us to imitate the Savior in this, so that we would learn to heap coals of fire on the heads of our enemies!

When Judas betrayed the Lord with a kiss, he became the exemplar of all apostates. Is it not true that most apostates in history betray Jesus with a kiss? They begin their treatises of theological poison with declarations of love and honor for the King. They proclaim their loyalty to the Savior and then bitterly attack everything He stood for. From the followers of Arius to the heretics of today, they almost always begin their books with a smooth, humble appeal to their

¹⁷ R. T. France, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 375.

¹⁸ Alfred Nevin, *Popular Commentary on the Gospel According to Luke*, 638.

¹⁹ Charles H. Spurgeon, “The Betrayal,” 9:89.

faithfulness to Jesus. “Yes,” they say, “we bring you a new paradigm in theology that is more faithful to God’s Son and His glorious gospel.” They seem so pious and devout in their love of Christ, yet inwardly they are ravenous wolves with hatred in their hearts for the truth. They betray the Son of Man with a kiss. They praise the Savior with their lips but their hearts are in tune with the devil and his lieutenants.

They kiss the Son outwardly and then drive out *sola Scriptura*, biblical worship and the true gospel from their churches with hatred, whips, the rack, the boot, steel and flame. Every apostate is a Judas. Like Judas, they have sold out the Savior to his enemies. Spurgeon writes, “It is a remarkable fact that we do not read, in the New Testament, that any *one of the twelve*, except *Judas*, ever *kissed Jesus*. It seems as if the most impudent familiarity was near akin to dastardly treachery. This *sign* of Judas was typical of the way in which Jesus is generally *betrayed*. When men intend to undermine the inspiration of the Scriptures, how do they begin their books? Why, always with a declaration that they wish to promote the truth of Christ! Christ’s name is often slandered by those who make a loud profession of attachment to him, and then sin foully as the chief of transgressors. There is the Judas-kiss first, and the betrayal afterwards.”²⁰ J. C. Ryle concurs with this observation:

Conduct like this, unhappily, is not without its parallels. The pages of history record many an instance of enormous wickedness wrought out and perfected under the garb of religion. The name of God has too often been pressed into the service of persecution, treachery, and crime. When Jezebel would have Naboth killed, she ordered a “fast to be proclaimed,” and false witnesses to accuse him of “blaspheming God and the king.” (1 Kings xxi. 9, 10.)—When Count de Monfort led a crusade against the Albigenses, he ordered them to be murdered and pillaged as an act of service to Christ’s Church. When the Spanish Inquisition tortured and burned suspected heretics, they justified their abominable dealings by a profession of zeal for God’s truth.—The false apostle Judas Iscariot has never wanted successors and imitators. There have always been men ready to betray Christ with a kiss, and willing to deliver the Gospel to its enemies under a show of respect.

Conduct like this, we need not doubt, is utterly abominable in the sight of God. To injure the cause of religion under any circumstances is a great sin, but to injure it while we pretend to show kindness is the blackest of crimes. To betray Christ at any time is the very height of wickedness, but to betray Him with a kiss, proves a man to have become a very child of hell.²¹

c) Jesus was betrayed for thirty pieces of silver (Mt. 26:16). “Although the exact value of the silver pieces is not known, the amount was comparatively modest.”²² According to Exodus 21:32 thirty shekels is the replacement price of a slave. This paltry sum indicates that either Judas was very poor at bargaining or even more likely, money was not his primary motive. In any case, thirty shekels of silver for the Creator of the universe, the owner of the cattle on a thousand hills, is an insult of the highest order. Judas exchanged the Lord of life for a pittance of money.

The general consensus of commentators is that Judas joined himself to Christ and His cause because he believed that the Messiah would rule over a mighty earthly empire and that each of the apostles would become a powerful, wealthy prince. As the Savior drew closer to the cross and the true nature of the kingdom was becoming more apparent, Judas’ professed love of

²⁰ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 387-388.

²¹ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1858] 1986), 2:429-430.

²² Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28* (Waco, TX: Word, 1995), 761.

Jesus turned to hate. Judas did not want the Savior for who He truly was and he did not want the kind of kingdom that He was bringing into existence. His betrayal was rooted in his unwillingness to accept the truth, his disinclination to jettison his false anthropocentric theology and his love of money and power. Thus, he cast aside the Son of God for thirty pieces of silver. By his question—“What will you give me?”—he even allowed the enemies of Christ to determine the price. They probably deliberately gave Judas the price of a slave to emphasize their contempt for the Master. Every aspect of the betrayal is a knife into the heart of the Savior. Each historical event is a descending step of humiliation on the path to Golgotha.

The example of Judas is especially relevant to modern “evangelicals” who essentially sell out Christ for money, power and fame. They, of course, are not handing the Messiah over to be crucified. But they are betraying the teaching of the Savior in order to build their own little empires. One of the central conflicts that our Lord had with the Pharisees was over *sola Scriptura* (the Bible alone) versus human tradition. The church of Christ is only to worship God in a manner prescribed by Scripture. Yet most modern churches will have nothing to do with such a doctrine. The truth is that entertainment and humanistic gimmicks bring in the cash. And, sadly, the average churchgoer today loves to have it so.

They have a similar attitude to Judas’ when it comes to religion. They ask: “What will you give me?” “What’s in it for me?” “Do you have a good rock band?” “Is the service entertaining?” “Do you have an exciting youth group?” “Do you have non-doctrinal sermons with lots of jokes and stories?” “Are the sermons uplifting so they increase my self-esteem?” In the name of church growth and love for the lost, churches betray Jesus for secular humanism dressed up in religious garb.

On a more personal level, we must always be on guard against the love of money and greed in our own hearts. In our consumer-oriented, capitalist culture, the sin which the world will not rebuke and ministers will scarcely touch is the inordinate love of money and the things money can buy. While a certain amount of money is necessary to support a family, it should never be a priority over service to Christ. How many professing Christians, by their actions, repeatedly place money above the Savior? How many families have left behind good, solid reformed churches to move to an area devoid of good preaching for the sake of a little extra money? There was a time in the not too distant past when good Presbyterians would not consider moving to any area unless there was a church with faithful theology, preaching and worship. But now the kingdom of God is often secondary to personal peace and prosperity. The love of money is the root of all sorts of evil (1 Tim. 6:10). We must beware lest we betray the cause of God and truth for money, for the things of this world, for trinkets which are passing away. If we don’t consider our blessed Redeemer first in all things; if we don’t place the truth of the gospel and biblical worship first; if we are not prepared to make sacrifices in our lifestyle to support the covenanted reformation, then we are making money our god.

d) There was humiliation in the manner in which our Lord was arrested. The sinless Savior was treated as a dangerous criminal. We see this in the arresting party and the weapons they carried.

The arresting party is described as a multitude by Mark and Luke while Matthew emphasizes the number with the phrase “a great multitude.” According to John’s account this crowd consisted of “a detachment of troops, and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees” (18:3). The Greek word *speira* translated as “detachment” (NKJV, NIV), “band” (KJV, RSV), or “cohort” (NASB) refers to a cohort or company of Roman soldiers. This word “is used

everywhere in the New Testament only of Roman troops”²³ (cf. Mt. 27:27; Mk. 15:16; Ac. 10:1; 21:31; 27:1). These troops were stationed at the tower or castle Antonia which was built by Herod the Great and named in honor of his old army associate, Mark Anthony. “The name Antonia is not used in the NT, but the castle is referred to as ‘the barracks’ (Ac. 21:34, etc.)”²⁴ This fortress was at the Northwest corner of the Temple complex area. It was built on a hill that overlooked the Temple area and thus provided a perfect military station to guard against riots or insurrection.

Josephus tells us that these troops were very active at the time of the Passover. He writes in *Antiquities* 20, 5, 3, “When the feast called Passover was come, on which it is our custom to provide unleavened bread, and a great multitude of people from all places having come together to the feast, Cumanus feared that some insurrections might occur, and therefore gave orders that a cohort of soldiers with their swords should be established in the court of the Temple, in order to quell any such insurrections as might arise.... *But the same thing was wont to be done by his predecessors in the government of Judea at the feast.*”²⁵ In his history of the Jewish war against Rome, Josephus gives us more details about this fortress. He writes, “But where it was connected with the Temple, there were steps by which the watchers (there was always a legion of Romans there) went down armed, and planted themselves in the courts at the feasts, to observe the people, that no uproar might arise.”²⁶

It was at the castle of Antonia that Paul would be imprisoned when he sought refuge from the Jews. As he ascended the steps from the court of the Gentiles up to the barracks (Ac. 21:31-22:29), he was permitted to address the Jews. Most scholars believe that Christ was tried at the Antonia fortress and that Pilate exhibited the Savior to the Jewish mob below as he stood on one of the castle’s balconies. Interestingly, Josephus tells us that “Titus made his grand assault upon the Temple area from the Castle Antonia.”²⁷ The Jewish leadership turned to the Romans to help them destroy the Messiah because they feared they would lose their position of power, wealth and influence. The result of this unholy conspiracy was their own destruction by the pagan Romans.

The term “cohort” normally referred to one tenth of legion or six hundred soldiers²⁸ (though in practice the number would fluctuate). In John 18:12 we are told that this “cohort” was commanded by a “captain.” The Greek word translated as “captain” or “commander” (*chiliarchos*) comes from *chilioi*, “a thousand” and *archon*, “ruler.” It refers to an officer in charge of a large body of troops. This word coupled with “cohort” has led some commentators to the conclusion that a whole “cohort,” or around 600 soldiers, were involved in the arrest of Jesus.

²³ E. W. Hengstenberg, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, 2:339.

²⁴ J. L. Kelso, “Tower of Antonia” in Gen. Ed. Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 1:197.

²⁵ Josephus, as quoted in E. W. Hengstenberg, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, 2:339.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ J. L. Kesko, “Tower of Antonia,” 1:197.

²⁸ “The term *speira* (if the soldiers were legionaries) was generally equivalent to the Latin *cohors*, which numbered 600 men. Polybius, indeed, uses it (xi. 23. 1) for *manipulus*, which is only one-third of a cohort. But here (if, as is probable, they were auxiliaries) and in the N. T. elsewhere (see. esp. Acts 21) it numbered 1000 men (240 horse and 760 foot), commanded by a chiliarch (cf. v. 12 below), a *tribunus militum*. It is not, however, to be supposed that Jn. means that the whole strength of the regiment (cf. Mk. 15) was turned out to aid in the arrest of Jesus; the words *labon ten speiran* indicate no more than that Judas had got the help of “the cohort,” *i.e.* a detachment, with whom the commanding officer of the garrison came (v. 12), in view of possible developments” (J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928], 2:584).

They argue that the Savior had so many followers that the Roman officials responsible for the security of the city during this festival were not going to take any chances.

The vast majority of commentators, however, believe that it is very unlikely that the whole cohort was involved in the arrest of the Savior. In fact, the term *speira* was used on occasion by the Romans to describe a *maniple*, which is only one third of a cohort or 200 men. But given the small number of disciples, even this seems rather large. Further, the whole point of arresting our Lord at night, in secret, away from the crowds was to avoid the possibility of a riot or insurrection. Therefore, John probably is “not saying that the whole *speira* was present, but rather [is] using a form of speech like our ‘the police came to arrest the man.’ Yet we must bear in mind that the Romans could use surprisingly large numbers of soldiers where one prisoner was in question (Acts 23:23).”²⁹

What is noteworthy about the location of the Roman garrison next to the Temple complex is that it explains how Judas and the Jewish leadership could so quickly organize an arresting party. After Judas went to the chief priests to inform them that immediate action was needed because Jesus knew about the plan to betray Him, a representative of the Sanhedrin or perhaps even the chief priest himself would have either contacted Pilate (the governor) or the commander of the garrison. If the second option occurred, the leader of the Roman forces would have then contacted Pilate before taking action. Matthew’s account of the trial (27:19) implies that Pilate already knew about Jesus’ case before the Savior was brought to him because his wife was preoccupied with this matter earlier during the day. In any case, the time that elapsed between Judas’ arrival at the Temple complex and the arrest of Christ was no more than a few hours.

Accompanying the Roman cohort were the Temple guards. These were Levites who served as a security force for the Temple complex. They were under the command of the chief officer (Greek, *strategos*). The Temple guard had failed to arrest Jesus on an earlier occasion (Jn. 7:45) because they were amazed at His teaching. This time, however, the accompaniment of the Roman troops, along with Judas and Malchus (the high priest’s personal servant), would make sure this failure would not happen again. Matthew, Mark and John emphasize that this wicked multitude had the full authority of the chief priests and Pharisees behind them (Mk. 14:43; Mt. 26:47; Jn. 18:3).

The official soldiers and guards were also accompanied by a group of curious onlookers. For instance, Mark mentions a certain young man who apparently rushed out with only a linen cloth wrapped around his body. For some unstated reason he had to flee the authorities (Mk. 14:51); perhaps he objected to the arrest of Christ or was recognized as a disciple. In any case, an armed group with torches and lanterns of such a large size would naturally attract a lot of attention.

The synoptic gospels’ use of the word “multitude” (Gk. *ochlos*), which could be translated “crowd,” indicates that by the time the organized military guard reached Gethsemane it had the appearance of a mob armed with swords and staves or clubs. The Roman soldiers would have been equipped with armor and the short double edged sword. Many commentators believe the Jewish guards had clubs. However, there may have been a combination of both in that, according to Josephus, Roman soldiers would often use clubs for police actions or crowd control. Given the fact that the Romans probably viewed Jesus and his followers in a class similar to the zealots who were dangerous, they were probably well equipped. While Jewish

²⁹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 741, footnote 5.

travelers commonly carried a sword for defense there is no evidence that the Jewish police force carried swords.³⁰

That the arrest of our Lord must be viewed as a part of His great humiliation is supported by Christ's response to this mob recorded in all the synoptic gospels. "In that hour Jesus said to the multitudes, 'Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? I sat daily with you, teaching in the temple, and you did not seize Me. But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled'" (Mt. 26:55-56). The Greek word *lestes* can be translated as "robber," "brigand," "rebel," or "insurrectionist." The Jews knew that Jesus was not guilty of robbery, rebellion or any violent crime, yet they treated Him as if He were a highway robber. Christ reminds them of His peaceful teaching ministry in Jerusalem. The Jewish people in this crowd knew of His purity, holiness and innocence; yet, they would arrest Him and slay Him as a malefactor, a common violent criminal. "He expresses His indignation at this. It adds not a little to the depth of our Lord's humiliation, that He consented to be *hunted down* thus by wicked men, and to be treated as if He had been the worst of mankind. The best of persons are more sensibly affected by the ill usage which wounds their reputation and honor, than they are by any other kind of injustice."³¹ Matthew Henry writes, "He *taught daily in the temple*, and if he had any wicked design, there it would have some time or other have been discovered; nay, these officers of the *chief priests*, being retainers to the temple, may be supposed to have heard his sermons there (I was *with you* in the temple); and had he not taught them excellent doctrine, even his enemies themselves being judges? Were not *all the words of his mouth in righteousness*? Was there any thing *froward* or *perverse* in them? Prov. viii. 8. By his fruits he was known to be a good tree; why did they come out against him as a thief?"³²

Theological and Ethical Lessons from the Arrest of Christ

The arrest of the Savior contains a number of important theological and ethical lessons that should not be missed.

(1) The manner in which the Jews aligned themselves with heathen Rome in the arrest and execution of their Messiah is the reflection and capstone to a whole history of syncretism and apostasy. Jesus came to give the Jews salvation, to free them from bondage from Satan, sin and death. He was the ultimate fulfillment, the antitype to Israel's redemption from slavery to heathen Egypt. The Savior came to bring men peace, freedom and salvation in the fullest sense of the term. He bid the Jews to give up their bondage saying, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Mt. 11:28-30). The vast majority of Jews and almost the whole of the political and religious establishment in Israel rejected the Messiah and His gospel of peace in favor of bondage to Rome.

When the Jews summoned the aid of the Romans to take their own Messiah captive and put Him to death, they were making an agreement with their slave masters against God's anointed. They in effect were saying, "We do not want your offered salvation; we prefer slavery to Egypt over a relationship with Jehovah." "Rather than acknowledge the Messiah who promises liberty from every bondage, particularly from that of the curse and of death, they kiss

³⁰ See E. W. Hengstenberg, 2:340.

³¹ Alfred Nevin, *Popular Commentary on the Gospel According to Luke*, 640.

³² Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 5:555.

the rod of those who tyrannize over them from Rome.”³³ In their hatred and spiritual blindness, they embrace the dark empire of their own destruction.

God calls upon all nations and princes to kiss the Son, to serve the Lord with fear and trembling (see Ps. 2:11-12). All magistrates have a moral obligation to acknowledge Christ’s salvation, lordship, authority, and rule. But instead of offering Jesus the kiss of love, trust and submission, the Jews with the Romans give the Prince of Life the kiss of betrayal, hatred, rejection and death. When Pilate asked the Jews, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priest answered, ‘We have no king but Caesar’” (Jn. 19:15).

There is a sense in which apostasy is the opposite of biblical repentance. With repentance there is a turning from sin, idolatry and rebellion toward the true and living God. Slavery to sin is set aside as one bows the knee to the King of Righteousness. With apostasy, covenant people turn from their commitment to Christ toward sin and idolatry. They exchange their professed bond-service to the Savior for slavery to Satan and his kingdom. In the days of Jesus, the Jews were obsessed with self-righteousness, self-exaltation, power and prestige. Therefore, they betrayed their Messiah and clung to their Roman slave-master. Those who remain enslaved to their sins prefer to take captive the Emancipator of slaves. They suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). They do everything they can to push the Son of God out of their consciousness. They cry out, “Crucify Him. Put Him to death. Cast Him away. Place Him in the earth.” The light of Christ and His truth is more than they can bear. Thus, they declare, “We have no king but Caesar. We will not have this Man rule over us. Give us the devil. Give us slavery. Give us bondage. Give us anything but Jesus.” Why is this madness the root of apostasy? Because, in God’s universe, there is no neutrality; there can be no fence-sitting. The covenant people had to align themselves with the Messiah or follow the world system, the satanic *weltanschauung*. And that is precisely what they did. To escape the Truth, incarnate and written, the Jews tightened the noose of unbelief and apostasy around their own necks and jumped into the abyss.

When we see the incredible hostility to Jesus and the gospel in our modern culture we must remember that the darkness has always hated the light and will do everything in its power to suppress it. Therefore, they came with torches and lanterns to arrest the Light of the world. In this act, treachery, apostasy, self-deception, blindness and spiritual slavery to the power of darkness all come together in a satanic harmony.

Should we not learn from their downfall? In light of our text we need to ask ourselves some searching questions. Do we betray our God by unlawful agreements with this world? Do we find ourselves in league with Satan by our acceptance of the state school system, religious pluralism, socialism, secular scientific myths and the like? How many professing Christians will be shocked on the final day to discover they have unwittingly covenanted with the devil against Christ and His kingdom? Do we betray the Christian faith by participating in the common sins of our culture such as fornication; pornography; drunkenness; gambling; watching lascivious plays, shows or movie; and attending Sabbath day sporting events? Are we aiding the forces of hell by corrupting the worship, teaching and government in our churches by adopting the ways of the world? We must never forget that the political and religious leaders who persecuted and murdered the Messiah believed they were serving God.

(2) The arresting party demonstrates the blindness and wickedness of unbelief and opposition to Christ. The Jewish police, the Roman soldiers and all the others involved witnessed the mighty power of the Messiah; yet, not one repented of their wickedness in opposing God’s

³³ Klaas Schilder, *Christ in His Suffering*, 418.

Son. After Judas kissed the Savior and withdrew back into the mob, Jesus boldly stepped forward and asked the crowd, “‘Whom are you seeking?’ They answered Him, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ Jesus said to them, ‘I am He’.... Now when He said to them, ‘I am He,’ they drew back and fell to the ground” (Jn. 18:4-6).

This casting of the ungodly to the ground was an amazing, dramatic demonstration of the Savior’s power. Although some commentators attempt to explain this passage in a natural manner (i.e. they argue that Jesus’ courage and boldness in stepping forward to identify Himself caused the mob to step back and accidentally fall down), such a view is not at all tenable. Roman soldiers were trained to stand at attention and not even flinch under terrifying circumstances. Further, it is unlikely that they knew much of anything about this Nazarene. Clearly the Savior’s power knocked this large mob right off of its feet. “In the word *ego eimi* [I AM], the Lord uttered forth the dignity of His person. Accordingly He struck the multitude like a flash of lightning. Jesus thereby declared Himself to be He of whom the prophet said, ‘And He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked’ [Isa.11:4].”³⁴ What a display of power! Several hundred young, strong, armed men went backward and then fell completely to the ground as if struck by a giant invisible force. “This was a peculiar and divine power which Jesus intended to display, not only in order to frighten the Jews, but also to strengthen the disciples.”³⁵

The whole purpose of this display of power was to protect His disciples. John writes, “Then He asked them again, ‘Whom are you seeking?’ And they said, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ Jesus answered, ‘I have told you that I am He. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way’” (18:7-8). “The tender thoughtfulness of our Lord for His weak disciples is strikingly shown in this sentence. Even at this trying moment He thought more of others than of Himself.”³⁶ He knew that He had to suffer and die and He also knew that the apostles must live on to receive power and preach the gospel. Thus, even in the arrest of Christ, we see the grace of God manifested. The disciples had been sleeping when they had been repeatedly commanded to watch and pray. They had failed to obey the Savior and were completely unprepared to meet the enemy. Yet, Jesus uses His divine power to protect them. He places them on the path to safety as He walks the painful road to His death. The disciples were delivered, not because they deserved it or earned it but because of Christ’s grace, love and compassion.

This act of grace was not merely for their temporal safety, but also for their eternal salvation. J. C. Ryle writes, “Our Lord’s preservation of His disciples included the means as well as the end. One means of preserving them from making shipwreck of the faith altogether, was to keep them from being tempted above what they could bear. Our Lord knew that they would be so tempted, and that their souls were not strong enough to bear the trial. If they had been taken prisoners and brought before Caiaphas and Pilate, with Himself, their faith would have failed entirely. He therefore provides for their escape, and overrules the plans of His enemies, so that the eleven were ‘let go.’”³⁷ John’s gospel contains a comment that indicates that our Lord secured the safety of the disciples in direct fulfillment of His high priestly prayer in John 17 where Jesus prayed to the Father that “not one would be lost”(17:12). Although in this context it applies specifically to the apostles, it is true of all God’s elect. Jesus not only intercedes for us by

³⁴ E. W. Hengstenberg, 2:343-344.

³⁵ Martin Luther as quoted in R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel*, 1181-1182.

³⁶ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: John* (Cambridge: James Clark & Co., 1976), 3:246.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 3:247.

His prayers but also takes direct action on our behalf so that every person bought with His blood will never suffer death but will be saved with an everlasting salvation.

The arresting party not only witnessed an amazing demonstration of the Savior's power when they were involuntarily forced to the ground but they also witnessed the miraculous healing of the high priest's servant (Malchus). Luke writes, "And He touched his ear and healed him" (22:51). Peter sliced off Malchus' ear with a sword. It was a fresh, bloody wound. Then right in front of this mob the ear was instantly restored to normal. One would think that this second amazing sign would have at least some effect on the arresting crowd; yet, it didn't. This raises the questions: (1) Why did these soldiers, Temple police and others who witnessed these signs continue their evil mission? (2) Were not these miracles indisputable proof that Jesus was the Son of God, the Jewish Messiah? There are a number of things to note regarding the fact that these proofs were completely ignored.

First, this event demonstrates the depravity of fallen man. The problem for unregenerate men is not that they do not have enough evidence for the truth about Christ, but that their hearts are spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1-5), hostile to God (Rom. 1:18-23), innately evil (Jn. 1:4-5; Rom. 3:12; 8:6-8), and completely blind to spiritual reality (1 Cor. 2:14). Paul says, "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). Apart from a direct work of the Holy Spirit upon the soul, fallen man is always attempting to push the true God out of his consciousness. He wants to live his life completely independent of the God who is. Therefore, he seeks to interpret "the facts" around Him without reference to God or the truth of Scripture.

Second, following our previous point we must not deal with unbelievers as if they were neutral with regard to human reason or objective factuality. What could be more objective proof than being an eyewitness of Christ's divine power? These events in Gethsemane militate against what is called evidential apologetics. This school of thought teaches that Christianity can be demonstrated to be "highly probable" by a neutral appeal to "brute factuality." In other words, the unbeliever can be won over to the truth of the Bible by appealing to "neutral" reason or to the "objective" empirical observations of science, archeology, history and so forth. The idea behind this type of apologetic is that we must approach the unbeliever with "objective facts" or "truth" in a manner that is acceptable to the natural man. Therefore (according to this view), the Bible cannot be the presupposition behind the presentation of "facts" or the manner in which we interpret factuality because this would violate the unbeliever's concept of neutrality. The great problem with evidential apologetics is that it presupposes a semi-pelagian or Arminian concept of man. It presupposes that fallen man still has objectivity. The truth, however, is that the natural man, like the mob at Gethsemane, would rather commit intellectual and moral suicide than acknowledge the truth of God in Christ. Unsaved men can only acknowledge the truth about the Savior and submit to Him if they are first subdued by the Holy Spirit.

Third, given these truths we must do two things. We must never compromise, water down, or fail to appeal directly to the truths of Scripture when we reason with or witness to unbelievers. We must never tone down our message in order to make it acceptable to the natural man. When believers do this in the name of neutrality, they unwittingly set aside their only offense against unbelieving worldviews. Further, we must become adept at pointing out the unbelieving axioms or presuppositions that lie behind the unbeliever's argumentation. If we

argue in this manner, then, and only then, do the “objective” evidences become truly powerful, for they are placed on the sure foundation of Scripture.

The mob that went after Christ was living in a self-created world of absurdity. To the Jews, the cross was a stumbling block (1 Cor. 1:23). Therefore, they chose to believe in the absurd: that Satan himself was casting out demons and healing the sick (Mk. 3:22), even though both of these signs were completely contrary to the devil’s nature and kingdom. To the Romans and Greeks, the gospel was foolishness (1 Cor. 1:18-23). The idea that the path to kingdom victory was through humility, suffering and death was, according to their worldview, utterly absurd. The men who arrested Jesus were irrational, unjust and thoroughly wicked because their hearts were at enmity with God.

(3) The arresting party demonstrates the evil of unlawful ecclesiastical and civil authority. In other words, this motley crew should have refused to follow orders that were unjust or contrary to Scripture. The ecclesiastical authorities did not have any biblical right to hunt Jesus down as a criminal. The civil authorities did not have any just reason to pursue Christ or arrest Him. The concept of authority where lesser magistrates, police, soldiers or citizens are said to have a moral obligation to obey laws and commands that contradict the Bible is a chief foundation of some of the most wicked deeds throughout history. When Nazis were questioned at the end of World War II about their atrocities, they often considered themselves completely innocent of any wrong because they were simply following orders. They would shrug off their responsibility saying: ““I saw women and children killed, but did not pay any attention to it; I have no opinion, I obey.””³⁸ By the standards of the caesar, the dictator, the lawless tyrant, such a response is perfect. It is what they strive for.

The truly autonomous man operates on the principle of either total ethical chaos or even more often, the principle of blind obedience. This is the driving principle behind: the arrest of Christ; the operation of all occult groups; and, the function of all dictatorships whether Marxist, Fascist or “democratic.” The soldiers of Rome and virtually all armies throughout history have had this principle drilled into them. In Germany “the Fuhrer principle” (*Fuhrerprinzip*) “led, step by step to the surrender of the will of the people to the will of the Fuhrer, culminating in such confessions as that of Rudolf Hoess, commandant of Auschwitz, just before his execution in 1947, that he would have gassed and burned his own wife and children, and himself as well, if the Fuhrer had asked it.”³⁹

In modern culture, we must be especially aware of statist efforts to first atomize the individual by destroying the role of the family and the relevance of the church and then remake the individual into a lap dog of the state. The goal of the modern humanistic state is to mold individuals into obedient subjects through mass education and mass media. The ultimate goal of the state school in our day is not education, but rather the propagandizing of children. A good citizen is not the well-educated Christian who can think and make intelligent decisions according to a higher standard, a transcendental law-word; the statist instead wants the useful idiot, the mass man, the unthinking slave. Statism is dependant upon people who are happy to follow not only lies, but grand lies. The less people are able to think, the better. The state-indoctrinated idiot will do what he is told and will justify any behavior or decision of his political messiah whether Hitler, Stalin, Mao or Clinton.

The Bible warns us very carefully to avoid the unthinking, immoral, follow-the-crowd mentality. It warns us regarding the dangers of blind obedience to authority. Exodus 23:3 reads,

³⁸ Dusty Sklar, *The Nazis and the Occult* (New York: Dorset Press, 1977), 112.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 46-47.

“You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice.” While most people prefer to conform themselves to current wicked social norms and pressures in either an active or passive manner, God declares such conformity to be evil and under His judgment. “Clearly the Hebrew law is cognizant of the economic, social, and political pressures which are exercised upon one who has allowed himself to become involved with special interest groups.”⁴⁰ The crowd that arrested Jesus followed the majority to do evil. They were willing to kill the Prince of Life and go to hell to fit in with the crowd. What does our text say about modern, antinomian democracy which implicitly says, “The voice of the people is the voice of God?” It unequivocally condemns democracy because it places the will of the crowd over the rule of law (i.e. God’s law).

(4) During the arrest of the Savior, the disciples received a warning regarding the use of carnal weapons in defense of Christ and His kingdom. After our Lord was betrayed with a kiss and the disciples saw that Jesus was being taken into custody they asked, “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?” (Lk. 22:49). (We are told earlier at the Lord’s supper that the apostles were in possession of two swords [Lk. 22:38].) Before Christ has time to answer this question Peter steps forward and attempts to kill Malchus—the servant of the high priest. (Apparently Malchus was in charge of this expedition and was standing in front of the crowd next to Jesus.) Malchus moves to avoid having his skull sliced open and the result is that his ear is severed (Mk. 14:47; Mt. 26:51; Lk. 22:50; Jn. 18:10). (Interestingly, all the synoptic gospels, which are written much earlier than the gospel of John, omit the names of Peter and Malchus. Apparently, they did not want to get Peter in trouble with the authorities. John, writing after Peter and Malchus are dead, is free to name names.) Apparently, after Peter saw the magnificent exhibition of the Savior’s power in subduing this large, armed mob, he thought that if he began a fight the Lord would be forced to take decisive action to end it. Once again we see that Peter and the disciples at this point have a very poor understanding of the gospel and the nature of Christ’s kingdom.

Our Lord’s response to Peter’s rash, impulsive, foolish act deserves careful consideration. “Jesus said to him, ‘Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus’ (Mt. 26:52-54)? John’s account adds the statement, “Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?” (18:11). Luke the physician says that the Savior then reached out, “touched his ear and healed him” (22:51). There are four things that we need to examine in this response.

First, Jesus condemns the unlawful use of violence. The proverbial saying “all who take the sword will perish by the sword” is an allusion to Genesis 9:6, “Whosoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed.” This passage is the first explicit statement in the Bible of the death penalty for murder. The people who came to arrest the Messiah were dangerous and wicked. However, they were the lawful authorities in Israel. Further, at the arrest of the Savior, there was no immediate threat on our Lord’s life. Jesus had to be tried and turned over to the Romans before He could be killed. Christ is telling Peter, in no uncertain terms, that if he used the sword to kill Malchus he would be executed as a murderer. Peter did not have the biblical right to slay Malchus. Calvin writes, “By these words, Christ confirms the precept of the Law, which forbids private individuals to use the sword. And above all, we ought to attend to the threatening of punishment which is immediately added; for men did not at their own pleasure, appoint this punishment for avenging their own blood; but God himself, by severely prohibiting

⁴⁰ Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus* (Louisville: Westminster, 1974), 481.

murder, has declared how dearly he loves mankind.”⁴¹ The Savior in this statement is explicitly upholding the death penalty for murder.

Our Lord’s statement raises a question. Is Jesus teaching that believers in every case are forbidden to use deadly violence for self-defense? No, not at all! Peter struck a representative of the government who had not even unsheathed his sword. There was no excuse for Peter’s behavior whatsoever. However, God’s Word does sanction the use of deadly force by a private citizen under certain circumstances. For example, God’s law permits a homeowner to use deadly force when necessary if someone breaks into his house (Exodus 22:2). We are allowed to use only the force necessary to protect life and limb. We are not permitted to use force because we think something bad will happen; there must be an immediate threat.

Second, Jesus was condemning the use of the sword by professing Christians when seeking to defend Christ’s cause or promote Christianity. If believers resorted to carnal weapons to spread the kingdom of God, they would stain the good name of their Master and bring ruin on themselves. The Savior’s kingdom is not of this earth. As our Lord said to Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here” (John 18:36).

The kingdom that Jesus established is unlike the Old Covenant nation of Israel which won their land by sword and battle. It is a spiritual kingdom that originates from heaven. The gospel is not to be spread like Islam which is in a perpetual state of war and violence. It is spread by the spiritual sword, the sword of the Spirit. The sword that proceeds from the white horse rider’s mouth, which conquers all nations, is the Word of God (Rev. 19:15; Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12). Therefore, Paul could write: “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ”(2 Cor. 10:4-5).

The Savior and Paul admonish us not to use carnal weapons in our fight with Satan and his minions, because carnal weapons do not work in this kind of fight. Sadly, the history of the church is full of examples of professing Christians who thought they knew better and thus attempted to defeat the world with their own weapons. This calls to mind the secular empire of the Pope, the crusades, the inquisitions and the savage persecution of people who were minding their own business. Even Christian nations (where the civil magistrate has covenanted with the Messianic King) do not have a biblical right to attack heathen countries unless they are attacked first. The kingdom of God is not to be spread through the offensive, coercive use of arms. If the sword is used to make converts, then such converts are usually useless anyway because they are hypocrites. True religion begins in the heart with the new birth, not with a gun to one’s head. External force only produces external professors of religion.

In our pluralistic culture, where even false satanic religions have virtually complete freedom, evangelicals will sometimes praise their own enlightened thinking, as they look back in horror at the blood-stained hands of the papal church. Even so, they themselves are often guilty of violating this principle in their own unique way. While it is true that they are not using weapons or physical coercion in gaining converts, they are still fighting this war with the arm of flesh—human wisdom and philosophies. They depend on the weaponry devised by the church growth experts with their business model of leadership, secular sociology, pagan psychology and

⁴¹ John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke*, 3:244.

Madison Avenue methodology. They think they can build the kingdom of God with the fleshly attractions of entertainment, massive buildings, programs and gimmicks.

These kinds of weapons do not and cannot make a dent in the strongholds of Satan. Although these carnal weapons make for large churches and big budgets, they do not extend Christ's dominion over this earth. The church is only assured of victory if it preaches *the whole counsel of God*. The weapon scorned by the world and yet most feared by the powers of darkness is the truth of God's Word preached and taught with the unction of the Spirit and saturated by prayer. When believers water down the truth, adulterate it and make it more palatable to the world, they turn the sharp two-edged sword that God has placed in their hands into a butter knife.

Our Lord's statement about the sword presupposes the biblical teaching regarding the separation between the domain of the political state and the domain of the church. Although the church speaks to every area of life in its prophetic role as the expositor of Scripture, it does not have the authority to use political coercion to advance the work of Christ's kingdom of grace. "In accordance with the type of salvation he brought, Christ refused to have the people make Him their revolutionary King (Jn. 6:15)."⁴² Peter's act had to be condemned for it not only would have been murder, but it also was an implicit act of revolution against the state. As members of a spiritual kingdom we must use weapons suitable to Christ's reign. Therefore, Paul exhorts believers to put on the "sword of the spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17).

Third, our Lord made it clear to Peter and everyone present that He did not need or want anyone's physical protection. This point is demonstrated by Jesus' person and by His divine authority. Only seconds before Peter's rash act, our Lord demonstrated that He had complete control of the situation. He flattened His enemies by the word of His power. The Savior also appeals to His authority as the Son of God. He said to Peter, "Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?" (Mt. 26:53). A Roman legion amounted to about six thousand troops. Therefore, our Lord is referring to an enormous number of around 72,000 angels. The number twelve is often symbolic in Scripture. Perhaps Jesus is saying that He could summon six thousand angels for each disciple and Himself. To understand the destructive capacity of such an angelic army, consider the fact that during the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib, king of Assyria, a single angel killed one hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrian troops in one night (see 2 Kings 19:35). "This is the consciousness with which Jesus goes into his death: at any moment, at his simple word, the sky could blaze forth with a tremendous host of mighty angels, whose swords could annihilate all these or any other enemies of his. That is the real help Jesus can call."⁴³ Given this reality, it is absurd and rather pathetic for Peter to swing his little sword.

The obvious implication of our Lord's statement to Peter is that His refusal to appeal to His Father to intervene on His behalf in sending this angelic army indicates that He is resolute to lay down His life as a voluntary sacrifice. Matthew Henry writes,

Note, God has no need of us, of our services, much less of our sins, to bring about his purposes; and it argues our distrust and disbelief of the power of Christ, when we go out of the way of our duty to serve his interests. God can do his work without us; if we look into the heavens, and see how he is attended there, we may easily infer, that though we be righteous, he is not beholden to us, Job xxxv. 5, 7. Though Christ was crucified through weakness, it was a voluntary weakness; he submitted to death, not because he could not, but because he would not

⁴² Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Nutley, NJ: The Craig Press, 1977), 420.

⁴³ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, 1052.

contend with it. This takes off the offense of the cross, and proves Christ crucified the power of God; even now in the depth of his sufferings he could call in the aid of legions of angels.⁴⁴

When our Lord hung on the cross and His enemies mocked Him saying, “He saved others; Himself He cannot save” (Mt. 27:42; cf. Lk. 23:35; Mk. 15:31), they revealed their spiritual blindness; for Jesus refused to save Himself even though He could in order to save others. He had to die if anyone was to be saved. What love is this that a sinless perfect Man would voluntarily die for His enemies?

From Jesus’ statement to Peter we can infer some important things. a) Not only is the idea of a Christian revolution unbiblical, it also demonstrates a lack of faith in the Savior’s power and promises. Earlier, our Lord explicitly taught the principle of Christian physical non-resistance to the heathen state. He said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two” (Mt. 5:38-41). In this last sentence our Lord is referring to the Roman soldier’s practice of “commandeering” civilian labor in occupied countries. This servitude was involuntary. “The Jews fiercely resented such impositions, and Jesus’ choice of this example deliberately dissociates him from militant nationalists. Rather than resisting, or even resenting, the disciple should volunteer for a further *mile* (the Roman term for 1,000 paces, rather less than our mile).”⁴⁵

Christ is not saying that believers cannot defend themselves against a rapist, murderer or thief. But that we must not lose our tempers, get excited, become obsessed or spend all our energies fighting against an oppressive state. If Christians insist on perfect justice from the state and spend all their time on political activism, protest and so forth, the gospel will not hold the center stage and people will not be truly changed. The Jewish Zealots, the revolutionaries, were successful in turning Israel into a wasteland full of rotting corpses while the Christians who went calmly to their deaths in the Roman arenas were instrumental in changing a whole culture from the inside out.

Our Lord wants us to be polite, gentle and kind to our political oppressors so that our meek, holy behavior will not turn unbelievers away from the glad tidings we present. Thus, Christ says that if a “soldier comes along and says you have to carry his baggage for a mile, not only do it cheerfully, but go the second mile. The result will be that when you arrive this soldier will say: ‘Who is this person? What is it about him that makes him act like this? He is doing it cheerfully, and is going beyond his duty.’ And they will be driven to the conclusion: ‘This man is different, he seems to be unconcerned about his own interests.’ As Christians, our state of mind and spiritual condition should be such that no power can insult us.”⁴⁶

b) Another closely related principle to the Savior’s injunction to Peter is that even when we are treated unjustly by our enemies, personal vengeance is not an option for the Christian. We must trust God in these kinds of situations and appeal to the biblical promises that such gross injustices will be recompensed by the Lord Almighty Himself. Paul writes, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.... Repay no one evil for evil.... Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’

⁴⁴ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 5:402.

⁴⁵ R. T. France, *Matthew*, 127.

⁴⁶ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1958, 59] 1971), 287.

says the Lord. Therefore, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap ‘coals of fire on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:14, 17, 19-21).

Fourth, Jesus makes restitution on behalf of Peter. Satan wanted to use this evil posse not only to arrest and kill the Messiah but also to stamp out the movement that the Savior had begun. Peter had given the devil a perfect opportunity. If a battle could be established because of his act of violence and the Redeemer did not intervene, the mob would have used the apostle’s act as a reason to cut the disciples down or at least arrest them. Therefore, Christ had to take decisive action. He says, “Permit even this” (Lk. 22:51). The Greek literally has the sense of “no more of this.” To paraphrase, “everyone stop this violence at once.” Jesus in effect is placing Himself between two groups on the verge of total bloodshed.

Then to ensure that peace is maintained and He is the only one taken, Christ heals Malchus’ ear with a touch. This healing demonstrates that our Lord was concerned with the law of God being obeyed even in such extraordinary circumstances. The Old Testament law required an “ear for an ear” or at least that a fine be paid to the victim to make restitution for the loss of his ear (Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Dt. 19:21). By immediately restoring the ear of the servant of the high priest to perfection, our Lord was not asking the arresting party to ignore a violation of the law, but to recognize that restitution had been made.

One thing that is very interesting about this healing is that the Savior healed a man who had no faith in God whatsoever. In fact, He healed an enemy of the kingdom. This example means that Jesus can heal people who do not have faith. He is sovereign over this power. Does this healing contradict earlier passages where faith is connected in some manner to the exercise of this power (e.g., Mt. 8:10; 9:22, 29; 15:28; Mk. 5:34; Lk. 17:19; 18:42; etc)? Or other passages where unbelief results in a lack of miracles (e.g., Mt. 13:58 reads, “Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.”)? No, there is no contradiction. Obviously people who do not believe in Jesus are not going to flock to Him to be healed. The people of Nazareth rejected Him and thus ignored Him. But, the small numbers that did have faith came to Him and were healed. “It is not necessary to go to the extreme of saying that no one was ever miraculously healed by Jesus unless he wholeheartedly believed in him with a faith to which nothing was lacking (see, for example, Luke 17:1-17 [note also, the man born blind was healed *before* he even knew who Jesus was, see Jn. 9:6-12]). On the other hand, it would be foolish to deny that divinely imparted faith was a great help (Matt. 8:10; 9:22, 28, 29; Mark 9:23), and that stubborn unbelief was a tremendous hindrance!”⁴⁷ The healing of Malchus disproves the whole word of faith movement (e.g., Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, etc) which teaches that God’s power is limited by man’s faith expressed in audible words. Christ is sovereign and can heal when and where He pleases.

Fifth, the Lord appeals to the need to fulfill prophecy and the necessity of His atoning death. Matthew says, “How then could the Scripture be fulfilled, that it must happen thus” (26:54)? John adds, “Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me” (18:11)? The Savior makes it clear to His disciples that the prophecies regarding Him are as unchangeable as God Himself who stands behind His Word. Prophecies reveal to us the decretive will of God. Therefore, they are *eternal* (i.e. they originate in the Divine being which is not limited by time or a succession of movements); *efficacious* (i.e. God, by a direct application of His power, ensures that what He determines will certainly come to pass); *immutable* (i.e. they are not subject to change because God Himself is immutable and faithful); *unconditional* (i.e. they are not

⁴⁷ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 582.

conditioned or subject to change by anything in creation); and *totally comprehensive* (in other words, there is nothing in the created realm that exists and functions outside of God's absolute control). When God says by the mouth of His prophets that certain things must come to pass regarding the Messiah, they must come to pass. Jehovah is in control of the ends as well as the means to the ends.⁴⁸

Our Lord's appeal for the need to fulfill prophecy is an implicit rebuke to the disciples for their poor understanding of Scripture and their misunderstandings regarding Messianic expectations. For many centuries God had graciously given Israel continuing revelations about the coming of Christ and had committed these prophecies to writing. The Hebrew expectation of a coming Redeemer had the seal of divine authority and served to give the covenant people hope during times of darkness and affliction. The promise of the Messiah was a means of strengthening faith in Jehovah in times of calamity and of promoting genuine piety and true devotion toward God. God used these prophecies to speak the gospel to people living yet under tutelage to the weak and beggarly elements of the law. Prophecy was extremely important because one of its main objects was to prepare the way for Christ, so that when He came, He could readily be identified by a comparison of the prediction with its fulfillment. Thus, our Lord appealed to the necessity of fulfilling prophecy (Mt. 26:54) and even rebuked the two disciples from Emmaus after the resurrection saying, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?" (Lk. 24:25-26).

The disciples should have understood that the prophecies regarding the Messiah had to come to pass. They had already observed some amazingly accurate predictions come true. Psalm 41:9 spoke of the betrayal by Judas, "Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me." The prophet Zechariah said that Jesus would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver (11:12). And, there were many prophecies yet to be fulfilled. In Psalm 22 we have an explicit description of the crucifixion where the crowds mock the Savior (vs. 7, 8, 12, 13); where even Gentiles stand around the cross (v. 16); His bones are out of joint from hanging on the cross (v. 14); while His sinless blood gushes out of His body like water (v. 14). Zechariah speaks of God the Father striking His close companion—His only Son with the sword of justice (13:7). Jehovah is the first cause of the death of His shepherd and the human authors are second causes; they are instruments in His hand. In Isaiah 53 we are told of the Roman scourging that brings spiritual healing to the elect (v. 5). The Messiah's behavior at His trial is described: "He was oppressed and afflicted yet He opened not His mouth, He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent" (v. 8); "He bore the sins of many" while "He poured out His soul unto death (v. 12)."

Although we may excuse the disciples for overlooking some of the more obscure prophecies regarding the Savior, there is no excuse for overlooking Isaiah 53. The disciples should have known that Jesus could only forgive sin and obtain victory through the blood of the cross. Christ had to be offered as a sin offering, a propitiatory sacrifice in order to procure for us forgiveness and righteousness. Given the perspicuous nature of many of the Messianic predictions, our Lord's words to Peter are a stinging rebuke. To attempt to stop the crucifixion is a manifestation of unbelief and an unwillingness to submit to the holy Scriptures. Thus, the Savior tells Peter to relent, otherwise how would all these prophecies be fulfilled? How would all the types regarding the atonement find their anti-type? How would God's justice be satisfied

⁴⁸ See Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1958), 104-105.

against sin? If Peter had his way, then the true biblical religion would have been completely overthrown. There would be no salvation and consequently no resurrection victory.

Whether Peter knew it or not he had allowed his personal friendship with Jesus and his defective knowledge of Scripture interfere with the gospel. We must learn from Peter's great error that friendship must never be allowed to alter our interpretation of Scripture or our obedience to the moral absolutes of God's law. A study of church history reveals that very often new heresies were tolerated and allowed to spread because of personal allegiances. We must be willing to rebuke error even in our closest friends and relatives.

It is interesting that when Jesus addressed Peter and the apostles He appealed to the need to fulfill prophecy; but, when He addressed His enemies He said, "But this is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Lk. 22:53). Christ tells His enemies that, "this is the period of time appointed beforehand by God for you wicked men who are acting under the power of Satan to have your evil way with Me." These should have been chilling words to the Jews in the mob. Our Lord is saying a number of profound things in this statement. For one, He is emphasizing the sovereignty of God in these events. Our Lord wanted them to know that they were only able to take Him prisoner and abuse Him because God foreordained or decreed it. Once again the Savior is emphasizing that God appointed the crucifixion and the Son voluntarily went to His bloody, agonizing death. "Christ determines the hour of His death, as a voluntary victim who offered Himself not out of [external] necessity, but out of choice and love."⁴⁹

Also, He is saying that these wicked men are instruments in the devil's hand. God is allowing "the darkness" (the forces of Satan, the devil and all his demons) this short period of time to have an *apparent* victory over God's Son. "That which was taking place involved a far deeper opposition than that between Jewish leadership and Jesus. It involved the cosmic opposition between Satan, the ruler of this age and God (cf. Acts 26:18; cf. also Luke 22:3, 31)."⁵⁰ With the arrest and binding of Christ the spiritual conflict that began with the protoevangelium in Genesis 3:15 and continued through history comes to a head. Yet the battle takes a perplexing turn. In this battle the holy angels of God must sheath their swords, step back and watch. "Michael must put up his sword; Gabriel may not unsheathe his; neither of these two may move against Satan.... All the angels are held back in order that all of the devils can move upon Gethsemane and Golgotha freely."⁵¹

The high noon of history has come. With God's permission the devil and his unholy forces come. Like hungry lions they pounce upon the Savior. "God Himself throws open the doors of the prison-house of hell; and all the ominous demons creep out of it and rush to Jesus, to hiss and sting Him unto death."⁵² Why does God allow the forces of darkness to bind His Son, spit in His face, beat Him without mercy and torture Him to death? The reason is that Jesus had to become a curse. He had to bear our sins in His own body on the tree. God was blowing the flames of His wrath against sin into a white hot heat to forever take away our sins, our guilt, our punishment and send them into oblivion.

The most important and decisive battle in all human and angelic history was fought alone. The disciples and the holy angels could do nothing but stand back, wait and watch. Only the divine-human Mediator could defeat Satan, sin and death. Do you now understand why He is exalted above all thrones, principalities and powers? When we see Him we will cast our crowns

⁴⁹ Alfred Nevin, *Popular Commentary on the Gospel According to Luke*, 641.

⁵⁰ Robert H. Stein, *Luke* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 562.

⁵¹ Klaas Schilder, *Christ in His Suffering*, 438.

⁵² *Ibid*, 439.

at His pierced feet for He achieved everything while we earned nothing. What a glorious salvation!

We find the capstone to Christ's rebuke to Peter in John 18:11 where our Lord says, "Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me." In Gethsemane we saw references to the cup (see Mt. 26:36; Mk. 14:36; Lk. 22:42), but here the Savior explicitly assigns the origin of the "cup" to His Father. In essence He says, "Peter do you not understand that these events are not arbitrary but come directly from My Father? Do you not understand that I came to obey the will of My Father?" "Shall Jesus, who has come for the very purpose of doing his Father's will, now evade that will and refuse the cup?"⁵³ God's Son had agreed to drink this cup in the covenant of redemption, in the eternal counsels of the trinity. To come to earth and not drink the cup is unthinkable. To refuse the cup renders the whole purpose of the incarnation null and void. To refuse the cup leaves all of God's elect in their sins, condemned to hell. To refuse the cup leaves all the nations firmly in the hands of Satan. To drink this cup was the most important event in the Savior's life and the most important event relating to our lives. Without it, we are forever lost, doomed and damned to hell. Without it, there can be no peace with God; no justification in the heavenly court; no adoption into the family of God and no glorification before the throne.

Our Lord's statement to Peter is given with an absolute resolve. The temptation to refuse the cup, which bore down on the Savior in Gethsemane only moments before, had been fully overcome when Jesus agonized and intensely prayed in the garden. The Father answered His prayers by strengthening His human nature, so that He would submit entirely to His Father's will. The arrest, trial and crucifixion of Christ show a complete willingness to suffer. "What an example this is for all believers in the time of trouble! Like our Master we may pray about it, and hope that like Him we shall obtain help by prayer. What a proof this is of our Lord's power to sympathize with suffering believers. He knows their conflicts by experience."⁵⁴

Seized and Bound

After our Lord's last miracle and last exhortation to Peter, He is seized and bound. John tells us that the Roman cohort, the chiliarch and the temple police were all involved in the arrest. The binding of prisoners was a common practice when arresting criminals.⁵⁵ It involved tying the hands together at the wrists behind the back. According to the church fathers the cord used cut through the Savior's flesh leaving a trail of blood from the garden to the house of Annas.⁵⁶ The hands that healed the sick with a touch; that blessed the heads of covenant infants; that washed the feet of the disciples are bound by sinners. What indignity and humiliation! The hands that had done nothing but good and mercy are tied together like a dangerous beast. "[T]he one who had come into the world to bring freedom, and apart from whom freedom is absolutely

⁵³ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel*, 1188.

⁵⁴ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: John*, 3:249.

⁵⁵ The fact that the Roman soldiers and their commanding officer are mentioned first implies that they played the leading role in seizing and binding the Savior. The verb seized (Gk. *sunelabon*) is a technical word for making an official arrest (see A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 5:286 and William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John*, 2:385). It was also the common practice of the Jewish authorities at that time to bind people when arrested to be brought before the Sanhedrin (see Ac. 9:1, 2, 14, 21; 12:6, etc; see Hengstenberg, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, 2:351).

⁵⁶ See Charles H. Spurgeon, "The Greatest Trial on Record" in *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 9:97.

impossible (see on 8:31-36), was himself bound. He was bound, however, in order that we might be loosed from our sins.”⁵⁷

It is at this point in the narrative that all the disciples forsake Jesus and flee (Mt. 26:56; Mk. 14:50). When they saw their Master seized by the authorities and bound their faith staggered. They now know beyond a shadow of a doubt that “Jesus does not intend to resist arrest, and is prepared to go to his death. The increased fears of recent days have been proved valid, and their resolution crumbles.”⁵⁸ Their hope that the Lord would use His mighty power to crush this mob was smitten to the dust. The Savior knew that this would occur for it was prophesied in Scripture (Zech. 11:12) and He Himself had foretold this dark event (Mk. 14:29-31). Christ knew the disciples better than they knew themselves. He knew that their understanding of the kingdom was defective and that they were weak spiritually. When the fierce wolves came, the sheep turned their back on their shepherd and fled for their own safety. “It would have been to the eternal honor of any one of the disciples to have kept close to Christ right up to the last; but neither the loving John nor the boastful Peter stood the test of that solemn time. Human nature is such poor stuff, even at its best, that we cannot hope that any of us would have been braver or more faithful than the apostles were.”⁵⁹ In the drama of redemption it was necessary that Jesus suffer humiliation, indignity and heart pain to the uttermost; therefore, His beloved disciples and closest friends must abandon Him to the satanic forces. Our Lord must face the cup alone. Hell is a place of perpetual loneliness, dread and anguish. Christ will endure the suffering of hell as a totally forsaken Man.; deserted by his friends and even worse, much worse, abandoned by God.

As we come to an end of our section dealing with the arrest of Christ we must not fail to notice the amazing contrast between Jesus and all those around Him. The Savior’s obedience to God’s will, holiness and perfect righteousness stands in sharp contrast to the wicked, corrupt, vile behavior and motives of the arresting party. His meekness, mercy and devotion are radically different from the violent, uncaring rabble. The Lord’s courage, calmness and determination also stand in sharp contrast to the cowardice, carelessness and panic of the disciples. In this narrative and the one to follow, the Messiah’s divinity, moral perfection and spiritual stature in bringing redemption to His people demonstrates Him to be infinitely greater than all the sinful mere mortals of history. The gospel narratives prove that our faith in Jesus should be strong and unshakable. Also, this teaching should bend our hearts in devotion to this Mediator. No matter what happens around Him, He is the Rock; He is faithful; He will never fail. Salvation is totally of grace because it is achieved by Christ alone. So often, because of the flesh, we are like the disciples. But, thank God, Christ is not like us. “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Rom. 8:37). What a glorious and beautiful Redeemer we serve!

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⁵⁷ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John*, 385.

⁵⁸ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 595.

⁵⁹ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 390.