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Gethsemane (Part 2)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In "Gethsemane (Part 2)", Steve Gregg discusses the events leading up to Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. He explores the mysterious incident of a young man who fled naked after laying hold of Jesus, as well as Peter's failed attempt to defend Jesus with a sword. Jesus ultimately accepted his suffering and betrayal, rejecting violence and defending his spiritual kingdom through non-violent means. Gregg draws on this example to emphasize the importance of trusting in the sovereignty and vindication of God rather than engaging in self-defense or violence.

Transcript

...followed him, having a linen cloth thrown around his naked body. And the young men, that is the soldiers, laid hold of him. And he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked.

This is a very strange little paracope. First of all, people didn't generally dress that way, you know, naked except for a linen cloth wrapped around them. Maybe, I don't know, maybe it was like a loincloth.

I don't know. Maybe it was a hot night or something. But some people feel that it was possible that this fellow had been in bed.

And as Jesus and his disciples were going on their way to Gethsemane, he had heard something and wanted to join them. He jumped out of bed and they were almost out of sight. So he grabbed his bedsheet and wrapped it around him and ran after them, apart from the bedsheet actually naked.

We don't know. There's just no way to know. It's just a strange little story.

And this is one of the guys who fled. And the sheet was grabbed from him and he ran away actually naked into the night. Now, it hardly seems like an important story, or an important part of this story.

Why would it be mentioned? I can see why it would be mentioned that Peter denied Jesus

three times or that Judas betrayed him with a kiss. First of all, those are significant characters. It tells us something about those men of whom the Bible has had a great deal to say.

But we don't even know who this young man with the sheet on is. So the mention of him just is really strange. I mean, even if such a case had occurred, it hardly seems necessary to have mentioned it, given the number of instances that were not mentioned by the Gospels.

The theory that some have held, and I suppose it's not a bad one, is that the young man was Mark himself. On this view, the reason for including it would be sort of his own subtle confession that he too had fled and abandoned the Lord at his time of greatest need, that he too had fled. It certainly is a subtlety, if that is it, because he doesn't give us a clue that it's himself.

On the other hand, in John's Gospel, whenever he talks about himself, he also remains anonymous. He always says, that other disciple, or another disciple, or the disciple whom Jesus loved, he never calls himself by name. And so it is not impossible that Mark is doing something like that, sort of throwing in his testimony, basically his confession, that he was there too, but when Jesus was arrested, he didn't stand by Jesus like everyone else who fled.

Anyway, Jesus secured the escape of his disciple's first thing. That was the first order of business. Now, there is no mention in John of the kiss.

So we have to go to the other Gospels for that. One of those would be Matthew, in chapter 26. Matthew 26, and verse 48.

It says, Now his betrayer had given them a sign, saying, Whomever I kiss, he is the one, seize him. Then immediately he went up to Jesus and said, Greetings, Rabbi, and kissed him. And Jesus said to him, Friend, what a strange thing to call him on that occasion.

Judas was anything but a friend on this occasion. But he said, Friend, why have you come? In another Gospel, I believe it is in Luke, he says, Judas, do you betray this man with a kiss? But here it is recorded, Friend, why have you come? Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took him. Interesting that Jesus didn't accuse him, he just asked him, you know, what's going on with you anyway? As I recall, we're friends.

What are you doing in this situation? How did you get compromised like this? How in the world did this ever happen to you? And we know that that saying was not without its impact on Judas' conscience. Because although we read of him not again until chapter 27, by chapter 27, Judas has become aware that Jesus has in fact been condemned to die, and Judas is overwhelmed with guilt and goes out and hangs himself. And so, the words of Jesus perhaps were like pricks for him.

We know that Jesus, well, we'll get to that later when we talk about Peter's denial. But we'll go on here. So Judas betrayed him with a kiss.

Now we're back in John chapter 18, I'm not done there. It says in verse 10, Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus.

Now, no other gospel mentions that the servant's name was Malchus. John who wrote this was apparently a friend somehow of the high priest's family, which is strange because the high priest was a bunch of crooks. But John, maybe through family connection somehow, was known to the high priest.

We read that later on, later in this chapter, that John followed Jesus and when they took him into the high priest's house, he just followed in, and Peter was afraid to go in. And John came and spoke to the girl at the door and got Peter procured an entrance too. So, I mean, John was known to the high priest, therefore he knew the servant, no doubt, by name, and in recording the story, he gives his name.

The others don't give that detail. The guy's name was Malchus. Then Jesus said to Peter, Put up your sword into its sheath.

Shall I not drink the cup which my Father has given me? Now, he'd been praying that the cup might be taken from him so that he might not have to drink it. He had said, Lord, the Father not my will but yours, and apparently it was now evident that God's will was not going to be for the cup to pass from him, so he accepted it. And he accepted it as from his Father.

Now, really, most of us in his shoes at this time would hardly be able to see God in the situation at all. The devil was looming very large. A friend betraying you, stabbing you in the back, one that you've done nothing but kindness for, calling for your death and so forth, and betraying you in this way.

His disciples, who were his swarthy band of defenders, all running away, some of them naked into the night. And then, you know, everything seems to be happening at the mercy of those who are in the devil's power. It would appear that sinners were in charge of the night.

In fact, I can't remember where it was. I thought it was in John, but it isn't. Jesus said on this occasion something about this is your hour.

Is this in Luke? Does anyone remember? Jesus said, this is your hour and the power of darkness. But that's... I'm surprised I didn't run into that already, because I read all the accounts lately. But I don't have time to go looking too far for it.

But... what is it? Luke 22, 53? Okay, good. Yeah, thank you. Yeah, okay, here's how Jesus

responded, too.

I mean, among the other things he said... This comes later, actually. I guess I'll read this after we come to it. Thank you for pointing it out to me.

Okay. In John 18, Jesus responds to Peter's action. Now, all the Gospels record that Peter, or at least some of them say one of the disciples, it was Peter, cut off with a sword the ear of the high priest's servant.

But the way Jesus responded to Peter is not quite the same in all the Gospels. Now, this may bother some people. It doesn't bother me.

I assume that Jesus said all the things recorded in each of the Gospels record only one part of it. John records Jesus saying, Peter, put your sword back into its sheath. The cup that the Father has given me, shall I not drink it? Although the devil and his activities were very apparent, Jesus saw the sufferings that came on him, though they came through the sins of others, as a cup that the Father gave him.

He received it from his Father. It's a lot easier to receive trials and betrayals and hardships and pains from your Father than it is to receive them from your enemy. And Jesus' view of the sovereignty of God in this situation was such that he had already said earlier, all things are possible to you, Father.

He knew that this would never have come upon him unless his Father wanted it. So he accepted it not from Judas, not from the devil, not from all those secondary players in the drama. He accepted it from his Father's hand.

No matter who brings your trials, it's always God who sends them, an old Puritan writer named Thomas Watson said. And that appears to be correct. It appears to be the way Jesus understood this.

And certainly we have other cases like Joseph and others, even David. When Shimei was cursing him, he said, the Lord has sent him to curse me. So anyway, we have the striking of the ear and Jesus telling Peter that it was appropriate for Jesus to accept this.

Now in Luke's version, actually, we don't actually read it quite the same. Luke tells us what the others do not in Luke 22, 49. When those around him saw what was going to happen, they said to him, Lord, shall we strike with the sword? Now this is the only gospel that tells us that this question was asked of him, though whoever asked it didn't wait for an answer.

Else they wouldn't have drawn their sword because he obviously disapproved. But they asked, Lord, shall we strike with the sword? And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus answered and said, Permit even this.

And he touched his ear and healed him. This is the only one of the gospels that tells us that Jesus healed the ear. All the gospels state that Jesus in some way or another registered his disapproval of the act of cutting the high priest's servant, but only Luke tells us that Jesus actually healed the ear.

And then it says in verse 52, Then Jesus said to the chief priests, captains of the temple, and elders who had come for him, Have you come out against a robber with swords and clubs? When I was with you daily in the temple, did you not try to seize me? Or you did not, whatever. But this is your hour and the power of darkness, he said. So this was the hour where Jesus was going to be delivered to the powers of darkness briefly, which he had always exercised lordship over in his earlier ministry, but it was now time for him to surrender to him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, according to Hebrews 2.14. Now, as far as his response to Peter goes, Matthew has it a little different yet.

In Matthew chapter 26, in verse 52, Then Jesus said to Peter, Put up 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 like this? So Jesus was more concerned to fit into his Father's plan recorded in the Scriptures than to deliver himself, though he could have. Now, there's many things in Jesus' recorded responses to Peter on this occasion that are instructive to us with reference to the question, Lord, shall we strike with the sword? Shall we practice self-defense? Shall we fight for the kingdom of God? And so forth with swords of steel and so forth.

And the answer is multi-fold. His first answer is, No, the cup that the Father gives me, I shall drink it. I can commit myself into his hands.

It's safe. Another thing he said was, I can call twelve legions of angels. I don't need your swords.

Thank you. If my purposes are in danger, I have more than adequate resources that are, you know, like invulnerable. Twelve legions of angels.

Your sword is definitely inferior to that, and therefore I don't need your help. I don't need your military efforts to defend me. On a time later than this, in John 18, when Jesus was standing before Pilate, and Pilate said, you know, I could kill you.

I could have you put to death. And he also said, Are you a king? And Jesus said, My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would have fought, so that I might not be arrested and taken by the Jews.

But henceforth, my kingdom is not from here. So his kingdom was not of the world. Therefore, he said it wasn't appropriate for his disciples to fight.

He has a spiritual kingdom. It can be defended by spiritual means. Even twelve legions of

angels is a spiritual defense if he chose to use it.

In this particular occasion, in Matthew, he also says, They that use the sword, or those who take the sword, shall perish by the sword. And that doesn't seem to be true if it's taken as a universal axiom. There are many people who are men of war who don't die in war.

In fact, when the war is over, they go home and they live in peacetime and die some peaceful way. Not everyone who uses the sword for survival will die in battle by sword wound. And for that reason, people have sought various ways to understand this statement.

One way that has been suggested by A.B. Bruce in his book, Fraternity of the Twelve. It was a very novel suggestion when I first heard it. I still don't particularly, I'm not convinced of it.

He thought that Jesus was speaking about that particular situation, saying basically, he who takes the sword, namely he and this group of my disciples who takes the sword, is going to die by the sword. If you want to engage these people in a confrontation, we are outmatched and if you're going to depend on your sword, then you're going to lose. Here we've got two swords in this band of disciples and here's a bunch of soldiers.

Many of them have swords in clubs. So if you're going to try to save your life by the sword, any of you who would take the sword at this moment, in this crisis, can look forward to dying by the sword. Now that would be a true statement and that might even be what he meant.

Although you could extend it beyond that, not to a universal axiom, but to a general principle. That those who trust in the arm of the flesh may have little else than the arm of the flesh to defend them. If you trust in God, God will be your defender.

Now he might not defend you in all the ways you prefer. He was Jesus' defender on this occasion and Jesus was arrested, taken, crucified and abused. But God was still his defender.

God was still his vindicator and it was better for him to leave his case in the hands of God so that the will of God could be done rather than to do the fleshly, carnal response in order to accomplish something preferable to the flesh, but not necessarily the will of God. God has resources enough. Twelve legions of angels were standing ready by with their swords unsheathed, ready to lop off the heads of every one of those officers that had come to take him had he just glanced once up at them with an indication of desire that they do so.

Okay, so let's see, we've got to come to a stopping point here. We are at a stopping point. I'm going to stop there.

It's in the middle of something we should have taken, but we'll get by. We'll get through it. So we'll stop there and we'll pick up probably in the middle of chapter 18 next time.