

Introduction

Bonnie and Clyde are infamous for a crime spree that lasted several years in the early 1930's. By the time they were stopped, they were suspects in multiples cases of robbery and burglary and theft and in 13 cases of murder including numerous law enforcement officers. They helped break people out of jail and the eluded capture over and over again. Over the months of their crime spree, law enforcement pursued them from Texas to Michigan to Louisiana. And as the crimes multiplied, the pursuit became increasingly intense and determined. Bonnie and Clyde were finally located near Rushton, Louisiana. Before dawn a posse composed of police officers from Louisiana and Texas concealed themselves in bushes along the highway where the infamous couple was soon to be traveling. Bonnie and Clyde drove into the trap but refused to be apprehended. And as they attempted to drive away, the officers opened fire, killing the two criminals. In Romans 13 Paul instructs us that the civil government bears the sword for a reason—to promote good behavior and take retribution upon the bad. This it did with Bonnie and Clyde. But before us today in Matthew's gospel is the consummate case of civil rulers taking retribution upon one against whom no criminal charges could be laid. Jesus was guilty of nothing more than exposing their own crimes against God. And it would seem they came at him with even more intensity and determination than the law officers who went after Bonnie and Clyde.

[Read Text and Pray]

It is a testament to the corruption of this world that when its own creator came to live here, he was greeted with contempt and basically run right back to where he came from. The earthly creatures that were made with the ability to appreciate the magnificence of their creator rejected him. They came after him as a dangerous criminal from which his creation needs to be protected. Matthew's account of the betrayal and seizure of Jesus puts before us a shocking main idea. The sinless Son of God is arrested as though he is a dangerous criminal. As we take a close look at the arrest, four aspects stand out.

First we observe that Jesus was . . .

I. Betrayed with a Kiss

Judas had left the Passover observance before Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. Knowing that the Lord and his disciples would be heading to Gethsemane as was their custom, he went to alert the Jewish leaders and bring a company out to arrest Jesus. That company would need to know which one Jesus was, so Judas gave them a sign. "The one I will kiss is the man; seize him." So when the company arrived at the garden, Judas went right up to Jesus. He greeted him and then he kissed him.

Clearly, there are different customs and ideas world-wide about kissing. The New Testament reflects a cultural idea of kissing that differs from ours. The Apostle Paul urges believers to greet one another with a holy kiss. Most Americans read that and go, "do what?" But in Judea in Jesus' day as in many parts of the world, a kiss is a normal greeting to express friendship and fraternal affection. J. C. Ryle suggests that when Judas kissed Jesus, he was simply doing what was customary when Jesus and the disciples greeted one another. And it sheds some light on the fraternal closeness Jesus shared with his disciples. We should regard Christ as a most warm and welcoming person. He does not hold people coldly at arms length but invites us into the welcoming affectionate warmth of

his company. He has not changed since he is ascended into heaven. Draw near to Christ and be greeted with tenderness and genuine gladness.

The shocking and disturbing dimension of Judas's kiss is the fact that this sign of affection was turned on its head. Instead of really indicating to Jesus his honor and gladness to see him and be in his company, this kiss showed brazen contempt. It was not just a show. It was a traitor's mockery of the love Jesus demonstrated and of the fellowship they had for three years now. For Judas the kiss demonstrated his true disdain for Christ at this point. Satan had at this time entered in to Judas, and you can almost hear the mocking laughter of the devil as Judas's lips embrace the cheek of Jesus. In the kiss of Judas here was supposed to be a sign of affection and admiration, but it was full of mockery and wounding.

The insincerity of Judas's kiss raises the matter of our displays of affection for Christ. To the world our songs may look like worship; our prayers may sound sincere; our service may appear that it is done in love for his glory. But are they? We probably do not mean to implicate Jesus, but what does it say about the genuineness of our hearts when we simply go through motions of praise and love for Christ? When you bow, are you really seeking the face of Christ. When you sing are you truly extolling his glory? When you claim to do his will, are you authentically serving the Lord? Sometimes as you offer yourself as a sacrifice of worship, just stop for a moment and check. Am I in a rut? Am I putting on a show? Am I really focused on Jesus or am I possibly focused on me? Remember the kiss of Judas. Jesus was betrayed with a kiss.

II. Defended with a Sword

A. Scholars estimate that the crowd which came for Jesus numbered at least in the hundreds, perhaps even as many as a thousand! Judas identified Jesus and the mob apprehended him. Then something remarkable happened. Matthew writes, "Behold, one of those who was with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest." The word behold indicates a stunning event. It is stunning that while here is this huge mob which had come to arrest Jesus, one of the disciples is ready to fight against them all. We learn from the gospel according to John that the disciple who wielded the sword was Peter. And we are not surprised, are we? As we have seen many times, Peter acts on impulse rather than with careful thought, just like we do sometimes.

How many times I have acted and spoken impulsively in ways I never would have if only I had waited a bit, prayed, and sought to respond according to God's word! Brothers and sisters, in the heat of the moment remember the exhortation of James to "be quick to hear and slow to speak." Similarly we should be quick to think and pray and slow to act.

B. Jesus tells Peter to put his sword back in its sheath and he explains why what he just did was not desirable even if Peter was being bold.

First, he explains that using the sword in this way is morally wrong. Jesus said, "All who take the sword will perish by the sword." This statement takes us back to Genesis 9 when Noah and family exited the ark. The Lord was granting man permission to kill animals and eat meat. But he was careful to distinguish killing animals from killing human beings since they are made in the image of God. He said, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image."

Paul teaches in Romans 13 that civil governments bear the sword to serve God by upholding what is good and carrying out God's wrath on wrongdoers. Here is Jesus' point to Peter. Taking human life is morally wrong—those who take up the sword will die by the sword—and so it is objectionable for the citizens of the kingdom of God. Peter, if you go down this path, you will find yourself being justly slain with the sword. The kingdom of God will not be built and defended by resorting to activities which God despises. The end does not justify the means.

There are just wars in which it is right for humans to bear the sword. There is a place for civil servants to bear the sword in protecting order and safety in society. The Bible allows for self-defense from attackers. But taking justice into one's own hands is not our right even if done in the defense of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus stood before Pilate, he explained, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would be fighting that I not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not of this world."

Paul reminds the Corinthians that our weapons are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and lofty opinions raised against the knowledge of God and take thoughts captive. Paul tells the Corinthians that our battle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. So you equip yourself not with physical weapons but with truth, righteousness, the gospel, salvation, the word of God, and prayer. Furthermore, engaging those lost in sin is not about manipulation and strong-arming them; it is concerned with preaching Christ so that our faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Psalm 20:7 says, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright." The kingdom of God is not defended or built with the sword.

And second, Jesus explains to Peter that using the sword this way is foolish. Jesus asks, "do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels (72,000)?" In essence, Jesus is telling Peter, I don't need you and your sword to protect me. God is big enough to take care of himself. Heavenly resources are available at any moment that will dwarf the power of the mightiest earthly foes. Sovereignty is sovereignty. The heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it where he will. What is happening here is exactly what the Scriptures have said must be so. Jesus had been telling Peter for weeks and weeks that he had to be handed over and killed. Peter thinks he is helping God, but he is actually resisting the things he has been shown over and over.

The lesson for you and me in our every day lives is that we should not fight against what God is doing. Here is where anxiety and fear, if allowed to do so, will cripple us. When things happen in your life that clash with your longings and hopes, do not become obsessed with fixing them yourself. Do what you can if you can, if God's principles for living allow, but at some point you just have to let God be God. Be faithful to what he has called you. Fulfill your God-given responsibilities, but if you have to sin in order to get what you want, that thing becomes an idol. Put the sword of personal pursuit back in its place.

C. Before we leave Peter, I do want you to think upon an important point that actually is encouraging about this whole situation. In his swinging of the sword, Peter was wrong, but he also

was embarrassingly unskilled. There can be no doubt that Peter's intent was not simply to dismember the ear of the high priest's servant. He wielded the sword to kill him not wound him. But the fact that he only cut off his ear tells us that Peter was not a very good swordsman. He was a fisherman after all. Yet I find some hope here. You see, Peter may have been an impulsive and lousy swordsman. But submitted to the control of the Holy Spirit, he who could not wield a sword of steel did in fact wield the sword of the word of God with power and precision and it cut to the hearts of those who heard. I am thinking specifically about the day of Pentecost.

On that day when a multitude came together in Jerusalem, it was Peter who stood with the eleven. It was this Peter who lifted up his voice and spoke with confident authority and conviction and power such as a sword of steel could never accomplish. "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give ear to my words." Peter preached Christ crucified according to the plan of God but brought about by guilty Jews. By Christ's death and resurrection God loosed the pangs of death. And God has borne witness by setting him on David's throne. The crucified Jesus is now Lord and Messiah. This is wielding the sword, now. As a result, the multitude was cut to the heart and said to Peter, "what must we do?" Peter commanded them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ to be forgiven and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. He went on with many other words bearing witness and exhorting them to be saved. And you talk about power! About 3,000 souls were saved that day and became followers of Jesus!

Perhaps there is one or even more listening to my voice at this moment who needs what the lost Jews needed on the day of Pentecost. The gospel message is the one Peter preached. Human beings are all transgressors of God's law. Jesus was willing to be seized in order that the Scriptures might be fulfilled and the promise of those scriptures is of a savior who bears the sins, the punishment, and the estrangement of the guilty so that the guilty can be reconciled to God and be brought into his family. Do you sense your guilt before God today and do you desire to be reconciled with him? You need to turn from sin and through faith identify with Jesus Christ crucified, buried, and risen from the dead as your sin bearer. You simply must trust in him.

We shake our heads sometimes in embarrassment for Peter's sake, but here on the day of Pentecost, we shake our heads in amazement of the great things God will accomplish through people who otherwise are basically useless. That is you and me. There may be times when you feel utterly embarrassed in trying to serve the Lord and sometimes there is good reason to be, but do not let that wallow in despair. Keep getting up. Keep following. Keep learning. God will do things through you to our amazement.

III. Captured by a Crowd

I already mentioned the size of the mob that came to arrest Jesus. It should be noticed that Matthew twice mentions the swords and clubs with which they came—first when they arrived and then when Jesus reproached them. The size of the mob combined with their weapons and the place and the time are all indicators of the hostility and animosity that fueled their purpose.

Day after day Jesus sat teaching in the temple in plain view. Jesus's great offense was teaching, but they are pursuing him as a great menace to society, as a robber, as though Bonnie and Clyde. The way they came after Jesus, you would get the idea that he had the codes to a nuclear bomb. The mob came as to a dangerous criminal when all Jesus ever did was help people. He healed. He fed. He blessed. He taught. The mob came at night to an out-of-the-way place. Jesus was in the temple day after day. Why didn't they seize him then? Because they knew Jesus was popular with the people. They knew they didn't have anything on him but their absolute disdain for the fact that he

exposed their sin. They came away from public observation at night in an out-of-the-way place because they knew without a doubt this was not right but that did not matter.

The image of this crowd is a depiction of what is wrong with the human heart by nature. Filled with corruption and pride and ingratitude, it wants to put God to the test and has already found him guilty of being someone it does not like. The human heart does not like holiness; it does not like guilt; it is repulsed by the ideas of righteousness and judgment. It would rather foolishly reject what is obvious while claiming to be wise than to admit it is foolish and truly be wise. The fallen heart worships and serves the creature rather than the Creator. It feels shame yet convinces itself there should be no such thing.

The fact is we all have the same flesh as those who came to capture Jesus. It is out of the fallen heart we inherit from our forefather that these things come. If God were not to restrain us and if he were not to administer grace to us, we would be even darker than this. It is good for Christ's followers to consider these whose hearts were so set against the Lord and recognize that is us without God's grace.

This portrait details the condition of all of us apart from Christ. We need to take a look at that crowd and see who we would be without the grace of God. And we need to look at their foolishness and darkened minds and hostile hearts and determination to bring Christ down. And we need to see ourselves apart from grace. From that look back, we look out at the way things are if we are in Christ and it should change our entire outlook—more praise for God's amazing grace, deeper gratitude for the riches of his kindness, greater joy for the privilege of being in his presence, heightened anticipation of the day we will be with him in glory, and stronger resolve to abhor what is evil and cling to what is good, to defeat sin and walk in holiness.

IV. Deserted by His Disciples

The arrest of Jesus culminated in the departure of the disciples. They all left him and fled. Jesus had just reiterated the point he has made over and over. All that was taking place was precisely according to the plan of God foretold in the scriptures of the prophets. So everything was all under control and it is just a fact that the great plan of God included the injustice and unthinkable darkness of human depravity. That evil men were apprehending Jesus was part of the plan. This kind of assurance should calm and bolster believers when going through challenging experiences. These disciples had the opportunity to hope and trust the Lord on the basis of his word. But they had slept when they should have prayed. They acted impulsively when they should have remembered the promises. They had leaned on their own estimation of themselves instead of heeding the warning of Jesus. And when their Lord has now been apprehended, they flee in fear. They did not realize how weak they were until they were tested.

Without a doubt we have the same tendency. We tend to think we are strong until temptation comes along. Every Christ follower needs to live in suspicion of what our flesh tells us about ourselves. Whenever the whisperings of the flesh tell you that you are good, strong, and consistent, do not listen! Failure in time of testing shows my weakness but it is when I realize I am weak that I in Christ and through Christ can be strong.

Conclusion

Bonnie and Clyde were killed because they tried to get away. Jesus was apprehended and killed because he would not try to get away. They got what they deserved. Jesus didn't deserve one drop

of the wrath he received, but he did it for you and me. "Was it for crimes that I had done he groaned upon the tree? Amazing pity, grace unknown, and love beyond degree.

Prayer

Benediction

As you know, Gladys Tatalovich passed away a week ago. One of her favorite passages of scripture was Hebrews 13:20-21. I dismiss you this morning with the prayer of these verses:

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.