

As we prepare to watch the summer Olympics in London England... let me tell you about **another** memorable event in that city. ... December - 1952... a toxic mix of **dense** fog... and the soot of black coal **smoke**... killed thousands of Londoners over the course of four days... It remains the **deadliest** environmental episode in recorded history.

Here is what happened:

As the smoke... coming out of London's chimneys... mixed with natural fog... the air turned colder. ... In response to that... Londoners heaped **more** coal on their fires... making more smoke. ... Soon it was so dark some said they couldn't see their feet.

By Sunday, December 7... visibility fell to one foot. ... Roads were littered with abandoned cars. (They simply could not see well enough to even pull over to the side of the road.) ... Midday concerts were cancelled due to total darkness. ... Cattle in the city's Smithfield market were killed and thrown away... before they could be slaughtered and sold — their lungs were black.

Funeral director Stan Cribb of T. Cribb and Sons... had led thousands of funeral processions through the smoggy streets of London. ... But he said the 1952 event... dwarfs all others he has ever seen. ...He remembers the moment he saw the first gray wisps: "You had this swirling, like somebody had set a load of car tires on fire."

... ..

London's 1952 killer fog... for many of us... makes an appropriate metaphor of the spiritual darkness that is **swirling** and building up all

around us today. It is a malevolent... sinister... and deadly darkness... that seems to be covering... not just our nation... but the entire world.

Governments... activists... politicians and bureaucracies... celebrities... and news media... are responding to adverse conditions and hardships that they see... and as they try to fix the problem... they only add more suffocating smoke. ... We are being choked by the economic collapse in Greece... in Spain... and our own economic worries... government intrusions... and run-away spending ... We are seeing the growing power of the Islamic Brotherhood... who dedicate themselves to Israel's demise... and who are creating turmoil throughout the mid-East in the aftermath of last year's "Arab Spring." ... And over in Syria... its own government is killing thousands of its own people... while Russia and China prevent any UN or international intervention to stop it. Being an election year in the US... there is all the highly charged... vicious political campaigning and rhetoric – all of it, of course, from the other side – that defies common sense. They can say whatever they want – without any basis of truth – and suffer no ill consequence for it. And you are certainly not alone... if you had a strong reaction... one way or the other... to the recent Supreme Court ruling on Healthcare.

I am OFTEN concerned and wanting to lash out with my own solutions. There are actions that I want to see enacted RIGHT NOW. A sense of urgency to put-into-play – what everybody should know is “common sense” - courses through my veins at times. The world is a mess... it is getting darker... and we are running out of time before it becomes UNfixable. ...And I have only mentioned economic and political turmoils. I haven't

said anything about the disappearance of moral standards – no more right and wrong!

Instead of acting **impulsively** to the increasing darkness... however... we **first** need a consistent Biblical perspective. ... Let's start with a reminder from Scholar, and former seminary professor of mine - D. A. Carson:

The "world" in John is a symbol for all that is in rebellion against God, all that is loveless and disobedient, all that is selfish and sinful. When we read therefore in John 3:16 that "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son," we are not to think that God's love is being praised by reference to the world's bigness... (God so loved the WHOLE world)... it is, rather, a reference to its badness. This ugly, sinful, rebellious world, this sewer of infidelity, this glut of endless selfishness, this habitation of cruelty, this lover of violence, this promoter of greed, this maker of idols — this world - God loved, and loved so much that he sent his Son.

We simply cannot forget that we are Christ's ambassadors... and He loves **this** world.

Our passage this morning in Luke points us to this truth... how **grace**-oriented Jesus is... and how we need a grace focus during the world's hour... and the hour of darkness. In fact... those are the very words that our passage uses.

Luke 22:53b

Some will tell you that triumph will come by the development of human beings - the gradual evolution of their potentialities. ... We should just give it time... wait and see. ... Everything... eventually will be coming up roses.

But... World War I dealt that theory the cutting **blow**. World War II broke its **spirit**. Vietnam laid it in its **grave**. ...The takeovers of Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan shoveled the dirt of interment on it.

Will human progress stop people and nations from sinning? ... Will human progress and achievement ever wipe away all tears from our eyes... or heal our broken hearts? ... Just to **ask** these questions is to **answer** them.

No... the final victory will **not** come through some natural progress of human development. Government (liberal or conservative) or education... will not be the solution. ... Neither am I waiting... with any kind of expectation... on the world's religions and spiritists... who are operative in the world right now. ... The victory will **not** come by an *improvement* of the present order... but through its complete **overthrow** and **replacement**. ...That will happen at the high point of human history... at the sudden appearance... on the field of battle... by the "Captain of our Salvation"... When Jesus returns.... ... This He will do... at any moment now... ... He will come in glory... and it will be comparable to what John beheld:" *Look, I see a great white horse. And there is a rider on that horse whose name is Faithful and True, and there are many crowns upon his head.*"

But at the **moment**... we live in the world's hour and the power of darkness. It won't always be this way. Knowing this... frees us to respond as our passage today in Luke would encourage us to react... in light of our present growing cloud of suffocating darkness. If we loose sight of Christ's Kingdom reign... His eventual return... we are most likely to act in impulsive wrongfulness. ... Our response will be anything but grace-filled.

A grace-filled response – is responding to our opponent with an action that probably looks **UN**deserved... remember... that is what “grace” **is**...unmerited favor. ... It is how Christ treats us. ... A grace-filled response... as Ambassadors of Christ ... needs to look like we are giving our opponents the exact **opposite** of what they deserve. Instead of responding to the perpetrators of this darkness... with anger or the same kind of vile hatred that they are passing around... we offer compassion and blessing.

Before you pass this off as utter non-sense... please stop and consider: *We will never overcome darkness – with more darkness!* It is both a physical and spiritual impossibility! **Light** is the only thing that can overtake darkness... not more darkness.

But let's be honest... our primary reaction is a desire to return fire. Instead of being Christ's ambassadors – often... our **initial** and sometimes **only** response... lunges from our depravity... and is a fleshly... panic-driven... logic-defying retaliation... ... We look just like the Apostle Peter in our passage of study this morning. Let's turn there now...

Luke 22:45-53

When Jesus rose from prayer... and stood glistening with blood drops like sweat in the starlight... He was a fearless pillar of determination and was in complete control. ... He knew Judas would soon come. ... And we get such an **immediate** sense from this reading... that He probably saw the crowd with their torches... coming toward the Garden.... where He and His disciples had been praying. (Well... **He** prayed... His disciples **slept**.)

Jesus must have seen the quivering shadows in the torch-light and the flashing of bronze armor.

With the Gethsemane prayer meeting now finished... each of the Gospel accounts show Jesus to be **serene** and in magnificent control of all events... including His arrest. ... The last time we were together in this passage (before my vacation) we centered our thoughts on this benefit that prayer will bring. Jesus told His disciples: "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." ... Praying throughout your day... acknowledging your need and dependence on Him... for every little thing... is the key for keeping us in Christ's will... instead of our own impulsive... fleshy actions. ... We are far less likely to think that we can overcome darkness by dishing out more darkness.

Significantly, both Matthew and Mark describe the kiss. Mark says, "Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, 'Rabbi!' and kissed him." ... In ancient cultures... as well as ours... a kiss is usually an outward expression of love... friendship... and affection. ... But Judas chose this most disarming gesture as a signal for the army to seize Jesus.

In the Greek... Mark's Gospel used two different words for kiss... in the same passage. When Judas said, "*Whomever I shall kiss*," Mark used the word *phileo*... which denotes a sign of respect and affection... such as one might give to a well-loved rabbi. ... But when Judas actually kisses Jesus, Mark uses the word *kataphileo*... which means that Judas kissed him with the **intensity** and ferventness of a lover. He pressed in hard on Jesus' cheek and kept it there beyond a natural duration. It was an excessive display... that he did not mean at all.

Sometimes the strongest enemies of Christ... are those who put on such an excessive **show**. They magnify their expressions of affection for Jesus in order for others to see. It goes beyond what is natural... and is just as phony as this kiss from Judas.

There may be some who will listen to a message like this... who only **pretend** to have an affection for Christ. But their true colors come out... when they refuse to submit to the **will** of Christ... especially whenever an oppressive darkness starts to billow. They would rather fight back – as the world fights... using with their own impulsive strength. Without much thinking... they attempt to defy logic and the Spirit's leading... trying to use darkness to overcome darkness.

But despite the diabolical betrayal... Jesus reached out to Judas... with grace. I don't think Jesus saw much hope for **saving** Judas... but Christ models for us... what it means to be **grace**-focused in all of our behavior. We are to offer people what they clearly don't deserve.

The question Jesus asked... combined foreknowledge with an appeal for repentance: "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" ...
"Judas... I am fully aware of what you have come to do..." Jesus knew Judas was leading those who would kill Him... to take Him away. But it was also a poignant appeal. *"Judas, how could you have chosen such a sign? Could you not have employed another way? Are you so dead, so beyond feeling, that you would use a kiss? Consider how far you have departed from all sense of what is right, Judas..."*

Would **you** be so concerned about the person's moral compass – who is trying to kill you...? Jesus apparently was. He does it again as He hung

on the cross... *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do...”* So did Stephen when he was martyred in Acts chapter 7. ... In Romans... the Apostle Paul reveals how he wanted God... if it were possible... to exchange **his** salvation... for the salvation of his fellow countrymen... the Jews... who were denying Christ... and trying to snuff Paul’s life out.

Luke 22:49-51

Those spiritually dull disciples... who did not prepare themselves through prayer... still had their two swords among them. ... And as we might have guessed... one of them was in Peter's possession.

John 18:10 (ESV)

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.)

Peter was the one who had boasted earlier in the evening... *“Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death”* — and he shows us here how serious he was.

Luke gives the literal blow-by-blow description: *When those who were around him saw what would follow, they said, “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?” And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear.*

If Peter was the one who asked the question... as some think it was... then the question was not really a question... ... because before Jesus could answer... out came Peter's *macharia* (a Roman short sword), and with poor aim but great determination Peter whacked off the right ear of one of the high priest's servants. Lucky for Malchus that Peter's sport was **fishing!**

More than one author describes Peter's move... as "pure stupidity." ... Peter was playing **perfectly** into the hands of the temple mob. ... Thanks to Peter's impulsive violence... the authorities could now claim that Jesus was leading a band of violent mercenaries. It looked like sure proof that He and his armed followers had been preparing for some guerrilla action. ..."*Look we just came out to talk to Him... and this is what they did! ... Jesus' gang had attacked the authorities...*" Jesus quite obviously... **now** looked like a political subversive.... Fighting darkness with darkness. Good job, Peter!

Peter's blunder had yet another grievous implication because later Jesus was to tell Pilate,

John 18:36 (ESV)

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."

If Jesus did not immediately mend Peter's errant sword-work... Jesus would **not** have been able to make this claim. ... Peter's courageous violence... was a direct **obstruction** to the divine plan. ...Peter's reaction was natural... the all too natural reaction of a believer who is unprepared by prayer. ... Peter's embarrassing *faux pas* would never have happened if he had heeded the Master's words, "*Pray that you will not fall into temptation*" (verse 40). ...Our natural responses... unprepared by prayer... get us into a lot of trouble... and may be obstructions to God's plan.

Peter made a number of **serious** mistakes when he attacked Malchus with his sword. ... Peter was fighting the wrong enemy with the wrong weapon.

Our enemies are not flesh and blood... and they cannot be defeated with ordinary weapons.

2 Corinthians 10:3-6 (ESV)

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

Prayer... and God's Word are our weapons!

Peter also revealed the wrong attitude... and trusted the wrong energy. While Jesus was surrendering... Peter was busy declaring war! ...And he was depending on "the arm of flesh." ... The lost world may act this way... but it is not the way God wants His servants to act

Amidst the confusion... ringing swords... Disciples trying to decide what to do... Jesus froze the action as he called out, "*No more of this!*" ... He then reached toward the gushing wound, "and he touched the man's ear and healed him." This was another breathtaking display of grace. The man's right ear had been severed, cut clean off according to John 18:10. He must have been in obvious pain... but he also faced other problems. Having no ear meant that he could no longer be a Temple guard. His life was spared... but his career was finished. Any person with missing appendages on their body was not allowed to enter the Temple. But Jesus acted with grace to His would-be captor.

Jesus at the very moment of his arrest... with blood on the ground and steel in the air... reached out to one of His enemies and healed him.

Some feel that John identified the servant as Malchus... because... as later writings of the church declare... this very man later became a Christian. ... But one thing is certain... Jesus controlled the circumstances of the arrest with majestic calm... and showed what it means to be grace-focused.

Luke 22:52-53

There is beautiful irony here. They could have taken him anytime they wanted if they had not feared the people. (Luke 19:47- 48 says that it was their fear of the crowd that prevented them). ... But this just shows that *they* were the lawless ones... and Jesus' challenge... questioned the legality of his arrest. ... This mob came under the cloak of night... like armed robbers. This behavior was an implicit **admission** that they were outside the realm of justice. ... Jesus' question undressed His captors... exposing their naked guilt. ... The physical darkness of the night matched and covered the moral darkness that was reigning in their hearts.

Our passage today presents us with three options... as we see a swirling cloud of darkness billowing around us. ... Each of us must decide whether we will go through life: *pretending*, like Judas... or *fighting*, like Peter... or *yielding to God's perfect will*, like Jesus.

Will it be the kiss, the sword, or the cup?

Be Christ's Ambassador. ... Be grace-focused!