



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 26:47-56

Topic

Jesus uses the occasion of Peter cutting-off a man's ear with his sword to show the superiority of the Word of God

Title

"From Ear to Eternity"

Introduction

There are a lot of famous swords, both from history and fiction.

Everyone has heard of Excalibur, the legendary sword of King Arthur. Some say it is the Sword in the Stone, while others say they are two different blades.

Glamdring, Orcrist, Sting, and Narsil are all well-known to fans of *The Lord of the Rings*.

The apostle Peter had a sword, made infamous when he used it in the Garden of Gethsemane to cut off the ear of the servant to the high priest.

English lore has it being brought to England by Joseph of Arimathea along with the Holy Grail.

In 968AD, however, a sword was brought to Poland by Bishop Jordan - a sword which he claimed was the actual sword of Peter. The Bishop's sword, as it is called, considered the true relic, remained in Poland and was eventually moved to the Archdiocese Museum in Poznan.

Did the sword belong to Peter? It is a *falchion* - a type of sword likely not in use during Peter's time. Metallurgy tests have dated it to long after his death.

Swords - not just Peter's - figure prominently in the account of the arrest of Jesus in the Garden.

- The disciples had at least two swords.
- Those who came for Jesus had many swords.

But the most important, and certainly the most powerful, sword in the Garden of Gethsemane was the one wielded by Jesus Himself.

It was the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. For example in the Gospel of John Jesus asks those who had come for Him, "Whom are you seeking?" They answer, "Jesus of Nazareth." He then says, "I Am," which is a name of God.

At this spoken Word, John records that the crowd "drew back and fell to the ground" (18:6).

A moment later He tells Peter to put away his sword because Jesus had at His voice command "more than twelve legions of angels" (Matthew 26:53).

These verses describe to Matthew's readers the factual events of Jesus' arrest. They also minister to his readers an important truth: The sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, is our preferred weapon in spiritual warfare, and for furthering the Gospel.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Be Certain That The Sword You Wield Is Not Of The World, and #2 Be Certain That The Sword You Wield Is Of The Word.

#1 Be Certain That The Sword You Wield Is Not Of The World

(v47-52)

We are told, directly, that the Word of God is sword-like in two New Testament passages:

Eph 6:17 And take... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

Heb 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

We see the power of the sword of the Spirit, the Word, when it is wielded by Jesus at His Second Coming:

Rev 19:15 Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations...

Rev 19:21 And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of [Jesus]...

It's not as obvious in the Garden of Gethsemane, but Jesus wields the sword, and it is shown to be superior in every way to the swords of His disciples and captors.

Before we press on, let me briefly address something that always comes up whenever we discuss Jesus and swords. Christian pacifists believe it is always wrong to injure other humans, no matter what the circumstances. And the same principles supporting pacifism carry over to nonresistance - the belief that any form of self-defense is wrong.

Since Jesus told Peter to put away his sword, and since He surrendered Himself to the authorities without a struggle - are we therefore called to lay down all weapons and be pacifists?

In a word, *"No."*

One commentator puts things into perspective:

In terms of following Christ's example, one must remember that His personal nonresistance at the cross was intertwined with His unique calling. He did not evade His arrest because it was God's will for Him to fulfill His prophetic role as the redemptive Lamb of God. During His ministry, however, He refused to be arrested because God's timing for His death had not yet come (John 8:59). **Thus, Christ's unique nonresistance during the Passion does not mandate against self-protection.**

Prior to His crucifixion, Jesus revealed to His disciples the future hostility they would face and encouraged them to sell their outer garments in order to buy a sword:

Luk 22:36 Then He said to them, "But now, he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one.

The "sword" He was referring to was a dagger or short sword that belonged to the Jewish traveler's equipment as protection against robbers and wild animals. A plain reading of the passage indicates that Jesus approved of self-defense.

The New Testament commends Old Testament warriors for their military acts of faith (Hebrews 11:30-40). Moreover, it is significant that although given the opportunity to do so, none of the New Testament saints, nor Jesus, are ever seen informing a military convert that he needed to resign from his line of work.

There is obviously a lot more that could be said on the topic of pacifism and non-resistance. For our purposes today, we're not really discussing whether or not we should all carry concealed weapons. That isn't at all what these verses are about. I just don't want there to be any confusion.

What we are looking at has to do with how we approach, and carry-out, ministry as believers who wish to promote the Gospel. We are to put-away *any* and *all* worldly means of serving the Lord and base our service totally on the Word of God.

In other words, relying on the world and its resources is being compared to wielding an inferior sword, when you could and should be relying on the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.

Mat 26:47 And while He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and elders of the people.

Judas had left the Last Supper to betray Jesus. He may have first led the arresting mob to the Upper Room and, not finding the Lord still there, taken them to the Garden of Gethsemane.

The Lord was not hiding; He was not avoiding arrest. He knew the time had come. In a few short but sorrowful hours, He would die on the Cross, just at the very time of day the Passover lambs were being slain in the Temple.

A "great multitude with swords and clubs" were dispatched, probably more because the authorities feared the crowds than they did Jesus. The Lord was popular with the people. Only a few days prior they had hailed Him as He entered Jerusalem, on what we call Palm Sunday.

John's Gospel says there was a "detachment of troops" (18:3), as well as "officers." Based on the words used, some have put the number of men with swords and clubs as high as one thousand or more. It seems unlikely there were that many, logistically; but there was a substantial group.

Mat 26:48 Now His betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him."

Mat 26:49 Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed Him.

To earn his blood money, Judas must lead them to Jesus, and positively identify Him. In the dark, by lantern light, in a crowd, at a time when there were no corrective lenses - Judas would need to get close to Jesus.

When it says Judas "kissed Him," it's a word that indicates multiple kisses. It's that kissing some cultures do, from cheek to cheek several times as a show of affection.

Jesus had already busted Judas - already let him know that He knew Judas was His betrayer. Yet Judas proceeds as if he is acting in secret right up until the seizure.

It speaks to us of how we sometimes act. When we sin, for example, we act as if the Lord doesn't know what we are doing. We might "kiss" Him, so to speak, in our devotions, or by serving Him - only to get right up and run to some sin we are committing.

Mat 26:50 But Jesus said to him, "Friend, why have you come?" Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him.

We saw in a previous study that, while God's providence was at work in the betrayal of Jesus, Judas acted by his own free will. He could have acted otherwise.

Jesus was still offering Judas salvation. "Friend" is a term of great endearment.

Why ask Judas "why have you come," when the Lord knew very well why? Remember the verse I shared earlier, about the Word of God being a sword? It penetrates the heart.

Jesus was speaking a Word that could penetrate Judas' heart, dividing between the soul and the spirit. He was evangelizing His betrayer right up until the end.

It's an example to us to wield the sword of the Spirit no matter our circumstances. To keep our focus on the Gospel, i.e., the need men and women and children have to be saved - regardless what they might be doing to us.

Mat 26:51 And suddenly, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.

The other accounts tell us it was Peter who wielded the sword; and that the servant's name was Malchus.

This swordplay is the action Matthew seems to want to focus our attention upon. A crowd of nonbelievers with swords comes against them. Jesus models for us the proper use of the Word as a sword, while Peter instead mimics the world by fighting on their level.

One practical problem with relying on the world's resources is identified here. The world is always going to be more powerful than you when you fight on its level.

Peter drew his sword. Earlier in the Gospel accounts there's a moment in which the disciples show Jesus that, among them, they have two swords.

What good are two swords against multitudes of swords? And what good are carnal, fleshly, physical things in reaching a heart for the Lord?

Matthew doesn't mention it, because he wants to stay on point, but Jesus healed Malchus' ear.

It's interesting, is it not, how the Holy Spirit edited the inspired writers of the Bible? I mean, I'd have a hard time leaving out that pretty major detail!

It ministers to us to listen closely to the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit as He leads us day-by-day. He knows what a person needs to hear, or see, in our lives. We must remain open and flexible if we are going to be used to proclaim the Gospel.

Here comes the application:

Mat 26:52 But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.

To touch upon pacifism once again, this verse is often cited as teaching that we must not use weapons. If we do, we will only, eventually, destroy ourselves.

But that's not at all what Jesus meant - not in context. Looking just at Peter, to whom Jesus was talking, if he didn't put away his sword, he *was* going to get hacked to ribbons in a fight with that multitude.

True, if you take up a sword you risk injury or death. Everyone in law enforcement, and in the military, knows this, and lives with that choice every day of their career. They do it because they have a moral responsibility to help those in need.

Jesus told Peter to "put your sword in its place." He didn't tell him to surrender his sword. The sword, as a weapon, has its proper place.

You know that famous line of dialog in *The Untouchables*, when Sean Connery's character says that his assailant has brought a knife to a gun fight? That's what Peter was doing here. The real weapon was the Word of God - *not* his puny dagger.

Jesus was letting Peter, His disciples, and us, know that with regards to serving Him and spreading the Gospel, the world's swords were puny weapons that will only get you in trouble.

When in doubt, look to Jesus.

There's a saying that's become hugely popular recently, even though it's been around a long time. It's the one that says, "Keep Calm," and then you add whatever you want.

"Keep Calm and Carry On" was the original saying. It was a motivational poster produced by the British government in 1939 in preparation for the Second World War. The poster was intended to raise the morale of the British public, threatened with widely predicted mass air attacks on major cities. Although 2.45 million copies were printed, and although the Blitz happened, the poster was never publicly displayed and was little known about until a copy was rediscovered in the year 2000.

The only one calm in the Garden of Gethsemane was the one Person Who seemed to have the most to lose; the one Person Who was being betrayed and arrested to His cruel beating and death at the hands of wicked men - men whom He came to bless, and heal, and save.

More about that in a minute. These first verses, while telling the events, also establish the priority and the power of the Word as our primary weapon in spiritual warfare, and for the furthering of the Gospel.

It is at the very least a reminder to us to not borrow techniques and strategies and methods from the world in order to try to accomplish spiritual things.

Something may seem like a good idea; it may even produce results on some level. But if it isn't led by the Spirit, and substantiated by the Word of God, it needs to be sheathed in favor of God's wisdom.

Using Peter as an example, we note that he was asleep in the Garden when he ought to have been in prayer. Then, faced with a situation, he resorted immediately to a worldly response - fighting swords with a sword.

It prompted Charles Spurgeon to comment, "It would have been far better if Peter's hands had been clasped in prayer."

Likewise we ought to trust in the spiritual weapons of our warfare as more than sufficient; they are superior.

#2 Be Certain That The Sword You Wield Is Of The Word

(v53-56)

We've already seen Jesus masterfully wield the sword of the Spirit. He was definitely ordering the events of His arrest, showing the disciples and Judas and the soldiers the power of the Word.

Just how powerful was Jesus?

Mat 26:53 Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?

Bear in mind that, in the Old Testament, two angels were all that were needed to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. And, really, I think the hard part was getting Lot to leave!

In another account, one angel kills 185,000 Assyrian soldiers as they sleep encamped in a siege against Jerusalem.

"More than twelve legions" is over 72,000 angels, locked and loaded.

Jesus did not call for angelic armies to deliver Him. It was an example to His followers of things to come. The age in which we live is one that is to be characterized by God being revealed as strong in our **weakness** - *not* in our strength.

Who is the greatest Christian of all time? Well, we won't know until we get to Heaven - and then it won't matter. But I'd bet most of us would say it was the apostle Paul.

Here is what he said about himself:

2Cor 12:10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

I recoil from words like "infirmities, reproaches, needs, persecutions, and distresses." They make it sound like you're having a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.

Let me list the kinds of things Paul meant by "infirmities, reproaches, needs, persecutions, and distresses."

2Cor 11:23 in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.

2Cor 11: 24 From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.

2Cor 11: 25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep;

2Cor 11: 26 in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;

2Cor 11: 27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness -

2Cor 11: 28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

2Cor 11: 29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?

2Cor 11: 30 If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity.

We don't usually boast in this kind of weakness. We even teach against it. Recently a pastor, at a conference (not a Calvary Chapel one), said that a fellow pastor who is having difficulties made a serious error by preaching almost every Sunday for several years without an extended leave of absence.

I think Paul would take issue with a statement like that. Since when is working hard a hardship on the level of being shipwrecked, or robbed and left for dead?

We need to get our game faces on in this thing called serving God. And by that I mean we must wrap our heads around the fact that "when I am weak, **then** I am strong."

Whatever you are going through, God has legions of angels at His disposal. If He doesn't dispatch them, you can be certain you don't need them to reveal true power. Your weakness becomes the pulpit from which power is preached.

Mat 26:54 How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?"

It's been calculated that Jesus, in His birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension, fulfilled **to the letter** more than 300 Bible prophecies.

Most of them He fulfilled without effort on His part, e.g., being born of a virgin.

And they were fulfilled by God's providence without Him ever violating the free will of the human beings involved.

The Bible is so common, so available to us here in America, that we no longer wonder at its prophetic accuracy.

Mat 26:55 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.

This wasn't spoken from bitterness. Jesus was establishing both His innocence and His deity:

- He was pointing out His innocence by saying they could easily have seized Him anytime in the Temple. The fact that they did not, but came secretly, in the middle of the night, shows that they knew He was not guilty of anything.
- He was pointing to His deity by mentioning the multitude, and their felt need for weapons. Why so many armed men to arrest one unarmed itinerant teacher? He must be more than a mere man.

Mat 26:56 But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled.

Another reference to the Scriptures being fulfilled. Fulfilled prophecy certainly shows the power of the Word of God. Unlike any other book, the Bible makes specific predictions that must come true to the letter - or else you can ignore the whole book.

Most of the Bible's more than 2500 prophecies have been fulfilled to the letter. It's a fact of history.

"Then all the disciples fled." From one perspective, it got worse-and-worse for Jesus. Betrayed by a close friend and colleague, arrested by those He came to help, now He was totally abandoned by the rest of His guys.

Peter and John would stop and follow from a distance - but then Peter would deny the Lord three times within Jesus' hearing.

It was according to plan - the plan of God determined before the world was ever created. The Lord, the God-man, God in human flesh, Jesus, must go to the Cross to die as Sacrifice and Substitute.

Then He'd arise... Then He'd ascend... Then He'd come again, and in that Second Coming, He will wield the sword of the Word very differently, using it to destroy the enemies of God so that He can establish the Kingdom of Heaven on the earth.

In the mean time... When it comes to spiritual service, and warfare, we are to wield the sword of the Word the way Jesus did; the way His disciples did after Pentecost; the way the apostle Paul did.

We are to reveal God's power through our dependance upon Him in our weakness.

Keep Calm and Carry On.