

With Swords And Staves

As soon as the Lord Jesus arose from His hour of spiritual sorrow and heaviness in Gethsemane, strengthened now by the ministering angel, the next part of His trial began. Out of the darkness appeared a large group of men carrying swords and staves. Among them chief priests, captains of the temple, and the elders. They were led by the traitor Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus' own disciples, and they had come to arrest the Saviour and take him to His death.

Prophecy fulfilled

This meeting of the Lord and His enemies in Gethsemane is full of significance and appears designed to supply us with several important lessons. For example, many Old Testament prophecies foresaw this encounter and find their fulfilment in these tense minutes. ^[1] Comparing parallel gospel passages we are given proof of Christ's divine power; we hear His searching and convicting words to Judas and the priests and elders; we see Peter's intemperate violence, and rightly reason the situation could have become very ugly had not the Lord intervened.

'A great multitude'

There would undoubtedly have been an element of uncertainty and unease amongst Jesus' enemies so they came in numbers, 'a great multitude' says Matthew and Mark. They came armed with swords and staves and bearing lighted torches. At first, they seemed ignorant of Jesus' identity and were relying on Judas to point out their quarry in the night gloom. Jesus had never harmed or hurt anyone, but He had evaded capture several times. Judas had seen many miracles, witnessed the awesome power at Jesus' disposal and knew devils quaked in Jesus' presence.

Judas's kiss

The Lord's power and authority, and, we may add, boldness and bravery, were much on display. John tells us, 'Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth'. Jesus' time had come and the Saviour went forth determinedly to face His foes. It is not easy to be sure of the order of the various things that occurred according to the different gospel writers but having identified Jesus with a kiss, it is likely Judas then stepped back into the crowd and the servant of the High Priest stepped forward to lay hands on Jesus.

Preventing a calamity

It was perhaps at this point Peter struck out with his sword, injuring the man Malchus. Certainly, this would have been an opportune time for the Lord to throw the multitude into confusion and cast them backwards onto the ground and hold them there. Now He addressed His own disciples about His determination to fulfil His Father's will, and also confronted the hypocrisy of the Jewish religious leaders about coming after Him in the dead of night, despite Him teaching daily in the temple. The Lord also insisted that as He alone was the object of their pursuit His disciples should go free. Having obtained this concession from the mob, the Saviour then let them up.

Christ's power on show

Two more evidences of the Lord's power were given. He touched and healed the severed ear of Malchus, servant to the High Priest, whom Peter had attacked, and He told His disciples that He did not need their help to fight. '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?' Now at their Master's submission and clear intention to go with the crowd, His disciples to a man leave Him and flee.

Christ's willing sacrifice

Now, the Lord's meekness and compliance shine forth. Drinking this cup was His Father's will and Christ's will also. Now He allows Himself to be detained, bound and marched back to the home of the High Priest in Jerusalem. In so doing He may be likened to the sacrificial lamb, bound and taken to the High Priest before it is sacrificed upon God's altar.

We also see the Lord's motivation and obligation to His covenant responsibilities. Our Saviour knew exactly what suffering lay before Him, and the death He would die. He knew about the High Priest, Herod and Pilate. He knew about the beatings, the scourgings, the crown of thorns. He knew what the scriptures had foretold concerning Him.

God's covenant purpose

But the Saviour also knew His role in the eternal covenant with the divine obligation that rested upon him to fulfil its terms. He knew and approved the purpose of God set up before time to supply a Substitute, provide a Redeemer, and secure the Salvation of His church and people. As His disciples escaped into the darkness of the Mt. of Olives the Lord Jesus slipped His wrists into the hand-ties of the priests and followed them back to Jerusalem.

Amen

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The several parts of the sufferings of the Messiah are foretold in the writings of the Old Testament; the spirit of Christ, in the prophets, testified before hand of them; as that he should be reproached and despised of men, Psa 22:6, be spit upon, smote, and buffeted, Isa 1:5, be put to death, Psa 22:15, and that the death of the cross, Psa 22:15, and be buried, Isa 53:9, and also the several circumstances of his sufferings, which led on to them, or attended them; as the selling him for thirty pieces of silver, Zec 11:12, the betraying him by one of his familiar friends, Psa 41:9, the seizing and apprehending him, Isa 53:7, his disciples forsaking him, Zec 13:7, and even his God and Father, Psa 22:1, his suffering between two thieves, Isa 53:12, the parting of his garments, and casting lots on his vesture, Psa 22:18, the giving him gall and vinegar when on the cross, Psa 69:21, and not breaking any of his bones, Psa 34:20.

(Extract from John Gill's Commentary on Matthew 26:54)