



Matthew 26:50–54

50 Jesus replied, “Do what you came for, friend.” Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. 51 With that, one of Jesus’ companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 52 “Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. 53 Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my

disposal more than twelve legions of angels? 54 But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?”

Reflection

(Today’s reflection is given by Craig Tubman)

Jesus is arrested. The cuffs are put on him and his fate is now in the hands of the temple guards and the Roman authorities. Or so it seems. This is not a completely uncommon scene in first century Palestine. A man being arrested for disturbing the peace, speaking of revolution, and arousing a spirit of opposition happened from time to time. And the disciples would have been well aware of the consequences. The

Roman Empire took a very strict stance when it came to opposition.

The driving emotion amongst the disciples at this point would most probably be fear. They were friends of the Messiah, they had aspirations of him taking charge of Jerusalem and them by his side; but now

both Jesus' fate and their own seems set on a very different course.

It's amazing what we do when faced with fear and uncertainty. We run or we fight. In the next section of Matthew's gospel he will record the disciples doing both.

Here we see a disciple, most probably Peter lash out in violence. Not just a push or a slap, he attacks the servant of the

High Priest and cuts off his ear. Such a violent and hateful act. Why would Peter, the very one who declared that Jesus was the Christ, the one who swore he would never deny Jesus, the one who followed Jesus as he walked on water now act in such an aggressive and unloving way?

I take it because he had been gripped by fear. And the source of that fear was a sense that he had lost complete control. Things were now out of control. And the only thing that he feels he can do to address this feeling is to lash out. He can't control the arrest of Jesus but he can control what he does and so he fights.

Do you know this feeling? I think a lot of anger comes from a fear that we're losing control. Perhaps we feel like we're losing

control of our reputation and so we lash out at someone who criticises us at work. Perhaps we feel like we're losing control of our identity so we lash out at our partner. Perhaps we feel like we're losing control of our health and we become grumpy and angry – with who or what we are not sure but anger becomes our new norm. Peter feels out of control and he lashes out in violence.

But Jesus, who himself is on the eve of great suffering, still has the composure to rebuke and mentor his disciple.

“Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword”.

To draw the sword means to seek vio-

lence as your negotiating tool. To draw the sword means to use aggression as your control mechanism. To draw the sword is to seek to control the uncontrollable. Jesus rebukes Peter for such an action. And the reason for such a rebuke is clear from Jesus – things are not out of control.

53 “Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? 54 But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?”

It is here in this moment that Jesus makes clear that this is exactly what must happen. There is no other way that one can enter the kingdom of heaven apart from being cleansed of their sin. There is no way for

our sin to be cleansed than for someone to take the punishment on themselves. An not just any someone, that would be unjust, but only God himself. The judge himself takes the punishment handed down in judgment for our sins.

If the disciples had eyes to see they would have picked up the reality of this all through the Scriptures. From the Passover Lamb in Egypt to the sacrifices at the temple and the prophecy in Isaiah that one day God himself will arrive as a suffering servant and be pierced for our transgressions. But right now they are gripped by fear and they respond by trying to control that which they cannot control. Whether they want Jesus to die or not matters very little. He must die, that is his mission, that is his role.

He greets his betrayer as friend. He will go on to pray for forgiveness for those who crucify him. Why? Because he is in complete control and he is doing what must be done.

It is not uncommon for us to want to control the uncontrollable. To control the traffic, to control the weather, to control our friends, to control our health, to control our world. It's not uncommon for us to want to control God. To obey him but only on our conditions. To worship him but only with a deep feeling of pride because we have earned our place in his kingdom.

Sometimes when we feel this control slipping we get angry at God. Not because of anything God has done but because we don't like being part of what God is doing

in this world, instead we want him to be part of what we are doing.

Jesus says, 'Put away your sword'. You aren't in control of this world, you aren't in control of your life, you aren't in control of the responses of those around you and you certainly aren't in control of God.

God's plan from the beginning has been to lift the curse of sin and reunite us, his created people, with himself. He achieved this once and for all in the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus and now he invites you to come join his kingdom. The very process of entering means a willingness to drop the control game and to trust that the one who is in control loves you and will guide you in all things to be more like his Son Jesus.

This may lead you through suffering or ill health or seasons of rejection – all things you would love to control out of life. But the promise in the Scriptures is that God is in control and he is on your side. Paul writes,

“And in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.” Rom 8:28–29

As Jesus approaches the cross he is in complete control. His word for those who follow him is to trust him in what he is do-

ing, and follow him living lives marked by love, forgiveness and the firm hope that our future is secure through the actions of our saviour Jesus.

Think & Pray

Take some time today to consider what uncontrollables you might be trying to control. What would it look like to let go of them and instead trust in God's ability to work in all things for your good? Why not pray and ask God for wisdom and insight?