

Jesus' Arrest

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[0 : 00] and verses 47 through 56. Matthew chapter 26, verses 47 through 56.

Ephialtes of Trachys was, according to historians, a rather sad man who had a real liking for beautiful woman and Persian gold.

During the invasion of Greece by the vast Persian army, the famous 300 Spartans led by Leonidas made their heroic stand at a mountain pass called Thermopylae.

There was no way past them because the pass was barely two meters wide. And the battle was at stalemate, that is until Ephialtes of Trachys betrayed his own people by revealing to the Persians a mountain track which led to the rear of the Spartan position.

Ephialtes' betrayal of his own people was motivated by his love for beautiful Persian woman and valuable Persian gold. But surely Ephialtes' betrayal was no more tragic than the betrayal and arrest of Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews.

[1 : 34] Matthew 26, verses 47 through 56 makes, on one hand, very hard reading for the Christian because it talks of Jesus' betrayal and arrest.

But on the other hand, for us as Christians, it fills us with joy because it reinforces for us Jesus' loving determination to give himself to take away our sins.

Here we have the story of salvation in a nutshell. Our Lord was betrayed and arrested for us. Our Lord was led like a lamb to the slaughter for us so that our sins could be forgiven and we have eternal life.

This story reminds us, does it not, of the never-dying faithfulness and righteousness of Jesus. His firm resolution that nothing shall stand in the way of his love for us.

Nothing. Nothing. Not even the possibility of a life of ease and comfort and certainly not the threat of a mob.

[2 : 46] I want us to consider together two things from this passage. Force, first of all, that force which was sent to arrest Jesus and what this tells us about our own human pride and fulfillment.

How through all of these events, Jesus is carefully fulfilling all the prophecies of the Old Testament and in doing so, he is offering himself up as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Remember, the key issue this morning is that though this passage has its epithelium of the Old Testament and the Holy Spirit of the Old Testament and the Holy Spirit of the Old Testament is that though this passage has its epithelium of Trachys, its betrayer, that's Judas, our gracious God remains sovereign over even the most evil deeds of men.

And his sovereignty means our salvation. And that's expressed not through the dominance of human force, but through the weakness of the cross.

First of all then, we want to look at force, force in this passage. There are many ways in which we could measure human advance.

[3 : 59] We could use our technological advancements as an example of how far we have come as a human race. We could use our medical achievements to judge our progress, our economic systems, our social care, our political and legal structures.

Many historians, however, choose to measure human advance in rather darker tones. Mankind has advanced exponentially in our ability to make war on each other.

No sooner is a technology discovered than that it is harnessed to a military use. And very often, military applications are the driving force behind the development of new technologies.

If all else fails, seldom does force fail. In the early 20th century, many philosophers thought that they'd pin their hopes for peace in the world on the development of technology.

And so they predicted a future where science would advance to such a level that mankind would live in a social utopia and war would be a thing of the past. But they were wrong.

[5 : 24] They were most terribly wrong, for no sooner did technology move forward than that human minds devised a way to use it for evil purposes. The 20th century was significant for two great statistics.

Great technological advances and great human suffering because of war. You see, the use of force comes natural to us as human beings.

That's the way that kingdoms of men achieve status and pursue their goals through force. It may not always be military force. It may be the force of argument, economic force, political force, but in whatever sphere, dominance is gained over others by force.

We see it working in our families, even down to the youngest of us. Children, even toddlers, fight over a toy. They scratch, they grab.

The strongest child becomes the king of the pride. Using force in whatever form to reach the top of the pile and to achieve dominance comes natural to us.

[6 : 39] If the altes of Trachis used his knowledge as force over the Greeks, even as the king of Persia used his beautiful woman and his gold as force over Ephialtes.

How different the kingdom of God. How different the kingdom of God. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, we have seen time and time again that the greatest among us are the least and that if anyone wants to be first, they have to be last.

The way up in the kingdom of God is not through force, but through faith. It is not a rise up to honor, but a descent down into humility. It is not being meaner than the rest.

It is being meeker than the rest. And the greatest comparison in this story is the use of force. Jesus uses it in one way.

The others all use it in another. Let's consider each group in this story. First of all, let's look at Judas Iscariot. Judas Iscariot.

[7 : 47] He carried no sword, but he is using no less force than anyone else. He is using the force of his knowledge of Jesus. They say that knowledge is power and it was for Jesus.

It was for Judas, rather. Judas knew Jesus would be in this garden at this time and so he led the mob right to him. And he also uses the force of his relationship or his friendship with Jesus.

The other disciples did not expect Judas, one of their own, to betray Jesus. It was with the kiss of affection that Judas betrayed Jesus.

In his own way, Judas Iscariot, you see, is using human force. He is manipulating the situation behind the scenes to force Jesus into doing what he wanted him to do.

And we must be very careful indeed not to forget that human force can be unleashed in many different ways. The major one in church being manipulation behind the scenes.

[9 : 02] Not being open about our actions or motives but doing everything we can behind the scenes to get other people to do what we want them to do.

Well, in the second instance, we want to consider the role of the chief priests and the elders. Because in one sense, they're the ones calling the shots.

They commanded the mob who arrested Jesus and with their money, they had bought Judas' heart. They were the most powerful men in Israel in Jesus' day.

And whether it's social, religious, or military force, they're going to use it to assert their dominance over others. In the third instance, we consider the role of the people.

After all, as we read in verse 47, the elders were the leaders of the people. Consistently throughout the book of Matthew, we have seen that the religious authorities are terrified of losing face with the people of Israel.

[10 : 05] They don't want to arrest Jesus too early in case they cause a riot among the people. And so, people can use collective force to govern their governors.

And then, fourthly, we consider the role of the soldiers. Here's men who are under the command of their hired officers. They are ultimately accountable to the religious authorities of Israel.

They're doing what they're doing because they've been told to do it. We don't know whether they had internal objections to this order, but what we do know is that having been guided to Jesus, they arrested him.

They used their muscle to seize him. But then, we also want to explore, fifthly, the role of the disciples. The disciples. When the mob comes, armed with weapons, the disciples instantly go into fight mode.

it comes natural to us to fight or flight. One of them draws his sword, cuts off the ear of the servant of the high priest.

[11 : 16] They want to fight fire with fire to live by the sword. They want to use the arm of flesh to defeat the arm of flesh because that's the way that natural men think naturally.

And you know, the thing is about this passage is, it's actually a really fascinating psychological study because the question is, who is in ultimate control of this situation? It's not Judas because he's been forced into betraying his Lord by his love for silver.

It's not the chief priests or the elders because they've been forced into arresting Jesus for fear of losing face with the people. Not the people because they're being forced into conforming with the thought world of the day.

Not the soldiers because they've been forced into obeying orders. Not the disciples because they are reacting with force according to their natural inclinations.

You see, that's the problem with force. Power over others is a dangerous illusion. The most powerful person in a group is often the weakest because he is entirely dependent upon the fear and obedience of those he dominates.

[12 : 39] The bully who humiliates his victims by force is always weaker than his victim. If we want to play the force game with each other, we need to listen very carefully to the words of Jesus.

The one who lives by the sword will die by the sword. You may be the most dominant person in this church, in your home, in the workplace, in your school classroom, but in reality you've got to ask yourself, who is dominating you.

And don't be surprised when someone bigger, uglier, and nastier than you finds ways to usurp your position. When I say that force comes natural to us as human beings, what I'm saying is that from the very beginning the sinfulness of our hearts has expressed itself in seeking dominance over others.

to be the lords of others, not their servants. To get them to work for us, not us for them. It is part and parcel of the sin of pride and no one of us is immune from this, not even the disciples of Jesus.

James talks about this, probably the most brilliant pastoral comment on church politics and existence and on personal relationships between Christians.

[14 : 15] He says, what causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires which battle within you? You want something but don't get it?

You kill and covet but you cannot have what you want? You quarrel and you fight? Force, whether visual or manipulative, whether in front of everyone or behind the scenes, that's the way it is with us.

How different our Lord Jesus. The Jesus who said to us earlier in Matthew's gospel, you know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their high officials exercise authority over them.

Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to be great among you must be your slave. Whoever wants to be first must be your slave, just as the son of man came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

For Jesus, the greatest is the least and the first is the last. And in no greater way does Jesus prove the point that the kingdom of God is so different from the kingdoms of this world, but in his humility and meekness in this story.

[15 : 39] So consider with me some of the ways in which Jesus repudiates the use of force in the kingdom of God. First of all, he lets Judas kiss him.

He lets Judas kiss him. He knew what Judas was doing. He let it happen. He could have fled. He endured the betrayal of Judas willingly.

Even now he gives Judas one last chance to repent. He calls him friend. Judas betrayed Jesus.

And yet Jesus is so in control of his emotions that he allows Judas to kiss him and still call him friend. Jesus refuses to use the force of emotional manipulation, passive aggression.

he humbly accepts his betrayal. Consider with me secondly how when the other disciples of Jesus draw their swords and try to defend Jesus with physical force, he tells them to put their swords away.

[16 : 53] We might have taken it as a compliment that our friends are willing to fight and die for us, but not Jesus. He doesn't need their swords or their muscles. He turns his back on any kind of physical conflict.

It's a lesson for us, is it not? Not so much concerning our own reaction to physical intimidation, but concerning the humility and meekness of Jesus himself. And then consider with me the most powerful demonstration of the otherness of God's kingdom in this passage.

Jesus says to his disciples, he says to them, do you not think that I cannot call on my father and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels, more than sixty thousand mighty, fierce, heavenly beings?

Think of the great power at Jesus' disposal, a power greater than anything this world can invent or twist to its own destructive designs. One angel is described in the Old Testament as destroying an army camp of nearly two hundred thousand soldiers.

That's just one angel. And Jesus has at his disposal sixty thousand of these angels. What is this mob of thugs in the garden compared to the mighty hosts of heaven?

[18:25] heaven? This then is this great demonstration of the otherness of God's kingdom, that though there is almighty power and indestructible might, Jesus chooses not to use it.

Rather, he humbles himself in meekness to the sacrifice of suffering. His greatness is seen best in his leastness, and his firstness in his lastness.

In no greater way does he prove himself our Lord than when he serves us. This is the gospel, is it not? A greater power than the world can invent or imagine.

That Jesus willingly gave himself up to death for us by shedding his blood and dying in our place.

Here in, you know, lies freedom and freedom from being controlled by worldly force.

To live in the meekness, humility, and loving determination of Jesus, his grace and his gospel. He lives to please others. Sorry, he lives to please God, not others.

[19:42] He lives not to find favor from others, but to fulfill scripture. He lives not to manipulate us with passive aggressive force, which subdues not through human force.

He lives to subdue us through divine love, not through human dominance, but divine service, not by taking from us, but by giving to us.

us. And so, as well as imitating Jesus in our repudiation of using worldly means to achieve spiritual aims, of using the arm of flesh, we want to view this passage more Christologically.

It shines as one of the brightest of lights, this humility, this meekness, this determination of our Lord Jesus Christ to be led like a lamb to the slaughter so that by his wounds we may be healed, and on account of our transgressions he may be pierced.

This passage, it opens up our hearts, and our hearts become filled not so much with pain, but filled with praise for the Lamb of God who takes our sin away.

[20:59] Jesus turns all human force on its head, and by his gospel he wins our love and praise, and now he invites us to live in the freedom of that gospel and be free from human force.

Second element I want to briefly look with you this morning at from this passage is fulfillment. We've seen force. The second element is fulfillment. There's so many aspects of this passage we could have focused our minds on.

given that I've devoted so much time to the force argument, and rightly so, I want to devote only the last few minutes to this fulfillment argument.

I'm doing this because we've seen this fulfillment theme working through Matthew before. The birth of Jesus was entirely according to the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament.

You cannot but read Matthew 2 without hearing the words this was to fulfill what was said by the prophet. I've often said it but if you were to take the Old Testament out of the Gospel of Matthew, you would have virtually nothing left.

[22:13] Everything Jesus says and does is in accordance with what he says he will do and say in the pages of the Old Testament. And now towards the end of his life, now a mature man headed to the cross, Jesus ensures that he continues to fulfill scripture.

In verse 54, arguing against the use of worldly force to ensure a worldly kingdom for himself and reminding the disciples that if he had so wanted he could have called upon twelve legions of angels from God to come to his aid, he asks them, but how then would the scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?

And then in verse 56, reflecting on how he would be betrayed and seized by force, Jesus said, all this has taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled.

You see, time and time again throughout the Old Testament, Jesus is pictured as the suffering servant of who will not break a bruised reed, but will be led like a lamb to the slaughter, a man of

sorrows, unfamiliar with grief, betrayed by a close friend, someone he's eaten with, and then seized and arrested by wicked men.

Everything is according to fulfillment. Even the disciples deserting him is according to the prophecy Jesus made early in this chapter and in the Old Testament.

[23 : 55] This is who Jesus is, coded in the Old Testament, clear in the New Testament, signposted in the Old Testament, seen in the New Testament.

The same Jesus who would, in the language of Isaiah 53, bear the sins of his people and by his knowledge justify many. the point is that even now, when it would seem as if he is powerless against all the forces of this world, he is in control.

He has a bigger, wider, and deeper purpose than any of his accusers can even begin to imagine. They think that by their actions, they are stopping Jesus.

little do they know that their actions, which will lead directly to the cross and resurrection, will begin a movement which has shaped the modern world.

Far from seizing Jesus in his sovereignty, he is seizing them. He is carefully fulfilling all the prophecies concerning who he is and what he'll do, the Lamb of God who will take away all the sins of the world.

[25 : 11] Yes, Jesus is the suffering servant, but he's also the sovereign Lord who is working history out according to the aim and plan of rescuing his people from darkness and death.

Filled with love, Jesus submits himself into the hands of his enemies because he knows that the way to the cross and our redemption goes this way.

Now there are literally hundreds and hundreds of ways we could apply this truth about Jesus fulfilling scripture in the account of his arrest. We could talk of how the world leaders make announcements condemning Christianity and even our own city fathers here in Glasgow try to ban the preaching of the gospel in our city.

The Lord Jesus is sovereign over all their opposition. and he is working to use their opposition to propel his kingdom forward and grow his church.

We could talk about how difficult circumstances in our lives and in our situations, situations we find rather confusing, not just a little bit painful, are actually working together for the furtherance of the gospel in our lives.

[26 : 36] The way of the cross is the way of discipleship, the way into humility and meekness, the way into faith, into believing God's promises and resting upon his grace and love for us in the gospel.

But ultimately, I want to leave that for yourself to think about. Ultimately, I want to leave us with this comparison. On one hand, Ephialtes of Trachis, this strange man, whose love for beautiful Persian woman and shiny Persian gold forced him into betraying his own people.

On the other hand, Jesus of Nazareth, God in the flesh, whose love for us and for the glory of his father drew him to refuse to betray us here.

Jesus could have run away. Jesus could have fought, but he did not. Like a lamb, he allowed himself to be led to the slaughter.

And you know, for all of us here this morning, this is the best kind of news. We don't serve a Jesus who will ever betray us or run away from us.

[28 : 02] But a Jesus who promises you this morning, whatever you are, if you're watching me on the screen, this promise from Scripture is for you. This is the promise of Jesus.

I will be with you always. We have a Jesus here who proved it by dying on the cross to take away our sin. Let us pray.

Lord, this morning we've been deeply challenged by your word concerning our attitude to human dominance, to getting things done.

Lord, we confess that so often we use our own personal force as a means to achieve things, dominance, whether that's the force of argument or the force of our economics or the force of our status or manipulative force.

Lord, we pray that you would cause each one of us to question our hearts today. Is there within me anything that manifests this pride in the way in which I try to achieve dominance over others, whether it's passive aggressiveness, whether it's belittling the views of others, or making myself out to be better than I am.

[29 : 36] Lord, we pray that you would help us to espouse the mindset and attitude of our Lord Jesus, who in humility considered others better than himself, who refused to engage in power politics, refused to manipulate, but in every way, shape, or form pursued the path of humility, service, and weakness.

But Father, today we're not here to learn a moral lesson. We're here to learn about Jesus Christ, and we're here to respond to him in faith and trust, and at the end of the day, we know that every human being, whoever they are, is laden down with a sin load of pride, but not Jesus.

Jesus, who loved us, gave himself for us on the cross, and became the very least. Lord, we want to respond this morning by, first of all, worshipping him with our minds and hearts, by believing in him with all we are, and then Lord, by imitating him, by being like him in our relationships with others. We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.