

The Folly Of Over-Estimating Physical Power.

Text: Mat 26:51-54

1) As We See It In Peter And Others

Suggested Hymns:

2) As We Should View It With Jesus

48, 373, 342, 426, 84

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 26:51-54, 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.* ⁵² *But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."* 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?"* ⁵⁴ *"How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?"* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Many worldly maxims or sayings are false. *"Might is right"* is one of these false maxims of the world. But still the world accepts it, believes it, and carries it out. Mighty nations of the world simply crush smaller nations because of superior power. Big business concerns, because of financial power, crush weaker competitors.

Man, physically stronger than woman, has again and again made sheer force his reason to enslave woman. It is the sad lot of many heathen women even today.

Not in the relationship only of nations, of business, and of the home has this false principle been followed, but even in the spiritual realm, the Church.

We have examples in the Passion Story. Enemies of Jesus, scribes and Pharisees, were church people who thought that they could get rid of Jesus by mere physical power. Pilate and the soldiers thought they had the right to nail Jesus to the cross because they had the might. Even the friends of Jesus inclined

to over-estimate physical power. *“Lord, shall we strike with the sword?”*¹ was the question of the disciples.

Peter especially over-estimated physical power. He thought that he could actually help Jesus with the sword. Many people today have wrong notions concerning the use of force or physical power in Kingdom work. Let us consider the folly of over-estimating PHYSICAL Power. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Folly Of Over-Estimating Physical Power As We See It In Peter And Others

Let us have a brief review of the circumstances. We have the Gethsemane scene. Jesus warns Peter that he will betray Him. Jesus goes to pray but the disciples sleep. The Saviour has complete anguish of His soul. Then Judas and his band arrive. Jesus had met them courageously. Jesus had shown omnipotent power by causing them to fall to the ground by the mighty *“I am He.”* Then Judas betrays Jesus. A kiss was the sign of betrayal. Jesus is arrested. Cruel hands take and bind Jesus.

Impulsive Peter goes into action. We read in our text, 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.* From John we learn that *The servant’s name was Malchus.*²

Why did Peter do this? No doubt his prime motive was love. He wished to protect his Master, whom he loved dearly, and he used what ever happened to be handy — a sword. Peter may also have thought of the boastful promise he had made on the way to Gethsemane, as we read in Matthew 26:33, ³³ *Peter answered and said to [Jesus], “Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble.”* Even though his motives may have been good, his action was a piece of folly. Certainly Peter over-estimated physical power, when he, a lone crusader, sought to attack an armed band.

The action of Peter was foolish because it was so hopeless. One man against a large number. It was inconsiderate. Jesus had asked him to watch and pray, but Peter slept. Now he embarrassed Jesus by doing what he was not told to do.

Peter's mistake of over-estimating physical power was dangerous. He could have caused the entire group of the disciples to lose their lives. It was useless because Jesus needed no such help. The omnipotent Lord had just caused the group with Judas to fall to the ground. Jesus could have had the protection of heavenly host. Over-estimating physical power was great folly on the part of Peter.

The history of Church shows that Peter was not the only one to over-estimate physical power. Enemies of the Cross have always over-estimated physical power. They have tried to drown the Church in blood. Ten blood-stained persecutions under ten powerful Roman emperors. They sought to exterminate the Christian Church by sheer force of arms.

Julian the Apostate, dying, saw the folly of trying to use physical force against Christ. He admitted, "*Galilean, You have conquered.*"

The so-called successors of Peter at Rome have made the same mistake over and over again. No longer having truth at their side, they sought to crush the opposition and drown the testimony of the truth by blood-sained persecutions. They persecuted the Waldensians, John Huss, Savonarola, and John Wyclif. Persecutions, prison, and fire were the torture weapons of Rome. All the power of Charles V was thrown against Luther and the Reformation, and still physical force could not silence the voice of truth.

Still the world has not learned its lesson. There are always people who over-estimate physical power, and seek to use it against Christ and His Church. We remember the Communistic experiment in Russia. Atheistic governments seek to crush out all religion from hearts of people. They did not succeed. New constitutions give many concessions to religion.

Concerning the over-estimation of power, we read in Psalm 2:2-5, ² *The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,* ³ *"Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us."* ⁴ *He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The LORD shall hold them in derision.* ⁵ *Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure.*

The same is true of Hitler and many dictators since them. As long as such people remain on the level of politics, they seem at times to accomplish

something with sheer physical strength but when they enter the realm of the spiritual, they certainly over-estimate their physical strength.

Dictators drunken with power, will have to learn *“to kiss the Son,”* as we read in Psalm 2. They should heed verses 10-12 of Psalm 2, ¹⁰ *Now therefore, be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth.* ¹¹ *Serve the LORD with fear, And rejoice with trembling.* ¹² *Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, And you perish in the way, When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.*

It is also foolish to over-estimate physical strength in the home. Many a man because of brute strength rules his home as a tyrant. Wife and children may fear, but will not love him. Physical strength does not give man the right to lay cruel hands upon his wife, the weaker vessel. We read in 1 Peter 3:7, ⁷ *Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.*

Parents are stronger than children. Children at times need physical punishment. The rod will help keep the Old Adam in check. We read in Proverbs 23:13, ¹³ *Do not withhold correction from a child* and in Proverbs 29:15, ¹⁵ *The rod and rebuke give wisdom, But a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.*³ The modern boy and girl needs more than mere show of physical power to make Christians out of them. They, like all people, need both the Law and the Gospel.

Physical power is good, a great gift of God, but it must not be over-estimated. Remember Goliath, Sennacherib, and Peter. Especially in the kingdom of God over-estimating physical powers usually works great havoc. Let us see how Jesus considered Peter and his show of physical strength.

2. The Folly Of Over-Estimating Physical Power As We Should View It With Jesus

We read in our text, ⁵² *But Jesus said to him, “Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.* Jesus rebuked Peter. *“Put your sword in its place.”* Christ and His cause needed no sword then, and it is not needed today. The cause of Christ needs faithful confessors, and undaunted workers. In this matter Peter had failed. In this matter he failed again in the

palace of the high priest. *All who take the sword will perish by the sword.* Those who use physical force against the law will find same force against them. They will easily perish.

Jesus needed no such help. He could still pray. *“Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father.”* This is something for us to remember. No matter how hopeless any show of physical power, we can always pray. The hymnist writes⁴

*Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
Take it to the Lord in prayer.*

Jesus needed no physical help from Peter. Jesus could have called twelve legions of mighty angels. Our text says, *Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?*

In the Old Testament we read that ONE angel killed 185,000 Assyrians. How much more could twelve legions have done against an ill-assembled band armed with swords and clubs. We read in 2 Kings 19:35-36, ³⁵ *And it came to pass on a certain night that the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses -- all dead.* ³⁶ *So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned home, and remained at Nineveh.*⁵

Certainly Peter had woefully over-estimated his own physical powers considering that the Saviour had such hosts of powerful angels at His command.

Jesus wanted no such protection by physical force. Our text says ⁵⁴ *“How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?”* Jesus wished to suffer. He wished to die. How terrible if Peter would have succeeded in driving off the foe! That would have hindered Jesus’ work of redemption. This would have been bad for Him, for the disciples, and for all of us.

Peter and the other disciples learned their lesson. After Pentecost they really conquered the world for Christ and His Gospel, not by swords and clubs, but by the testimony of truth. It was the truth that Peter and the other disciples preached.

Luther did not over-estimate physical force. He did not attempt to reform the world by law or force of arms, but by the power of Word, the Sword of the Spirit.

We must learn the same lesson today. Scripture says in John 17:17, ¹⁷ ***“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.”*** And in Mark 16:15, ¹⁵ ***“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”*** Mere force will not build good Christian homes, good business establishments, good Christian schools and least of all a good Christian Church.

Our weapons are not carnal, but spiritual. What are they? We read in Hebrews 4:12, 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.”*** Let us use them, use them often, use them mightily, and Christ will give the victory. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Luke 22:49

² John 18:10

³ See also Proverbs 22:15

⁴ Hymn 426

⁵ See also Isaiah 37:36