

Matthew 26:51

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear.

Analysis

And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear (καὶ ἴδοὺ εἷς τῶν μετὰ Ἰησοῦ ἐκτείνας τὴν χεῖρα ἀπέσπασεν τὴν μάχαιραν αὐτοῦ καὶ πατάξας τὸν δοῦλον τοῦ ἀρχιερέως ἀφεῖλεν αὐτοῦ τὸ ὡτίον)—John 18:10 identifies 'one of them' as Peter and the servant as Malchus. The verb ἀποσπάω (apospaō, 'to draw away, to unsheathe') shows Peter drew his μάχαιρα (short sword). The blow ἀφαιρέω τὸ ὡτίον ('cut off the ear') was violent but ineffective—Peter aimed for the head but only got the ear. Luke 22:51 records Jesus healing the ear, demonstrating mercy even during His arrest.

Peter's violent response reveals misunderstanding of Jesus's mission—he fought to prevent what must happen. Well-intentioned but misguided, Peter's action would have made Jesus's followers insurrectionists, justifying Rome's brutal response. Jesus had to rebuke him (v. 52) and undo the damage (healing Malchus). Fleshly zeal without spiritual understanding creates disasters. Peter's impulsive violence contrasts with Jesus's controlled submission—showing the difference between human effort and divine obedience.

Historical Context

Peter's sword (μάχαιρα) was likely a short blade, possibly for self-defense while traveling. Jesus had told them to buy swords (Luke 22:36-38), but when Peter used

his, Jesus rebuked him—the swords were for fulfilling prophecy ('numbered with transgressors,' Isaiah 53:12), not actual combat. Malchus (Μάλχος, probably 'king' or 'counselor') was the high priest's servant, possibly Caiaphas's personal attendant. Peter's attack on the high priest's servant could have resulted in execution—Jesus's healing protected Peter from legal consequences.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. When have you, like Peter, fought in the flesh against what God was accomplishing through suffering?
2. How does Jesus's healing of His enemy's servant (Malchus) model loving enemies even while they attack you?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	ἰδού,	εἷς	τῶν	μετὰ	Ἰησοῦ	ἐκτείνας	τὴν
And	behold	one	G3588	of them which were with	Jesus	stretched out	G3588
G2532	G2400	G1520		G3326	G2424	G1614	

χεῖρα	ἀπέσπασεν	τὴν	μάχαιραν	αὐτοῦ	καὶ	πατάξας	τὸν
his hand	and drew	G3588	sword	his	And	struck	G3588
G5495	G645		G3162	G846	G2532	G3960	

δοῦλον	τοῦ	ἀρχιερέως	ἀφεῖλεν	αὐτοῦ	τὸ	ώτιον.
a servant	G3588	of the high priest's	and smote off	his	G3588	ear
G1401		G749	G851	G846		G5621

Additional Cross-References

Mark 14:47 (Word): And one of them that stood by drew a sword, and smote a servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.

John 18:36 (References Jesus): Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.

2 Corinthians 10:4 (Parallel theme): (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)

Matthew 26:35 (Parallel theme): Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.

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