

## **“The Power of Darkness” (Luke 22:47–53)**

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How do you respond when someone hurts you? How do you respond when someone close to you betrays you and violates your trust? If someone hates you and acts in a way that is unfair toward you, do you respond in hate and with unfair tactics? Or do you respond in a way that is different, a way that reflects truth and love?

How we respond to difficult situations reveals who we truly are. When the pressures of life come upon us and we feel like we’re being squeezed, the real me and the real you will be exposed. What happens to us when we’re attacked, when we’re hurt, when we’re treated unfairly?

Today, as we continue to study the Gospel of Luke, we’re going to see Jesus’ arrest. We’ll see that he is betrayed. His arrest isn’t conducted publicly and in the light, but in secret, in the dark. His disciples try to respond one way to this arrest, by striking back. But Jesus responds with love.

We’re going to read Luke 22:47–53 this morning. Before we do, here’s a quick reminder of where we are in this story. It’s the night before Jesus will die. He has spent the last few hours with his disciples. He has taken a Passover meal with them, taking the elements of the meal, the bread and the wine, to demonstrate what his death will accomplish. He has warned them that one of the twelve disciples will betray him. He has also warned them against seeking greatness, teaching them instead to be humble and to serve, for that is the way to true greatness in God’s kingdom. He has told Peter that he will deny knowing Jesus. He has told them that the Scripture about him will be fulfilled, that he will be “numbered with the transgressors.” And, as we saw last week, he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, east of Jerusalem, that if there were any way possible, that he would be spared the suffering of the wrath of God that he would experience on the cross. Yet he yielded to the Father’s will.

Now, let’s read Luke 22:47–53:

<sup>47</sup> While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, <sup>48</sup> but Jesus said to him, “Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?” <sup>49</sup> And when those who were around him saw what would follow, they said, “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?” <sup>50</sup> And one of them struck the servant of the high priest

and cut off his right ear. <sup>51</sup> But Jesus said, “No more of this!” And he touched his ear and healed him. <sup>52</sup> Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? <sup>53</sup> When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.”<sup>1</sup>

I want to point out three things that we see here. The first thing we see is Judas Iscariot’s betrayal. We have already talked about this, when we saw that Jesus predicted this betrayal. But now it comes to pass. After Jesus prays, Judas, who had left the group at the last supper, comes back with a crowd. Luke says that among the crowd were Jewish religious leaders, “chief priests and officers of the temple and elders.” Judas was in front of the crowd, and he identifies Jesus by kissing him, probably on the cheek.

Why does Judas kiss Jesus? A kiss was a common greeting of respect and love. It might have been the kind of greeting the disciples gave Jesus after they had been away for a while. It seems that Judas had arranged to identify Jesus by some sign. It was dark, and perhaps the officers of the temple didn’t know what Jesus looked like. Today, the identifying sign might have been a handshake or a hug. But in that time, it was a kiss.

Yet the kiss is ironic. Instead of a sign of love, it was a sign of hate, a sign of betrayal. The man who had spend a couple of years with Jesus, who was part of his inner circle of twelve disciples, who had been the treasurer of the group, betrayed Jesus. He told these Jewish leaders how they could arrest Jesus away from the teeming crowds in Jerusalem. He knew that Jesus would be alone with his disciples, just outside the city. The leaders could arrest Jesus without any public backlash, without setting off a riot. Jesus sold Jesus out.

Think about that for a moment. We believe that Jesus is no ordinary man. He is the God-man, the eternal Son of God who also became a human being, one person with two natures, one divine and one human. That means that while Jesus had all the essential characteristics of a human being, he was still God. He was still omnipotent, all-powerful. Yet Jesus made himself vulnerable. He loved these men. He served them. He spent a great deal of time with them, traveling with them, teaching them, revealing truths to them that the rest of them would teach and preach and write down.

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

Though Jesus knew in advance that Judas would betray him, it must have been something else to experience it. It's one thing to know something is going to happen. That's knowing a fact. It's quite another to experience it happen. Jesus knew he would die, but it was quite another thing to experience a painful death and the spiritual suffering that came along with it. In a similar manner, Jesus knew he would be betrayed, but it must have been sorrowful all the same to see one of his friends betray him this way.

And what does that mean for us? Jesus knows what it's like to be betrayed. I don't know if you have experienced betrayal in your life, but you probably have. Of course, the betrayals that we experience are often not as dramatic; most people when they are betrayed aren't put to death. But anytime someone we love, someone we have made ourselves vulnerable to, turns on us, that's a betrayal. It could be a friend who has betrayed your trust. Betrayal can come from a co-worker. Betrayal can even come from a spouse. I know that I've experienced betrayal. There have been people that have been close to me, people I've trusted, who then surprised me by turning on me. Perhaps you've experienced the same thing. The fact that someone we wouldn't expect to turn on us does is the worst aspect of betrayal. The loss of a relationship is worse than losing a job or experiencing some other bad consequence of betrayal. When people we love turn on us, we're hurt and confused. We don't know if someone else will turn on us, too.

When we finish the Gospel of Luke, we're going to look at the book of Proverbs. Judas' betrayal of Jesus reminds me of a passage in Proverbs. This is what Proverbs 27:5–6 says:

- <sup>5</sup> Better is open rebuke  
than hidden love.
- <sup>6</sup> Faithful are the wounds of a friend;  
profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

Real friends will tell you the truth. They will "wound" you with things that you may not want to hear, but they will do that directly. The kisses of the enemy, however, might appear flattering at first. People who don't truly love us will say things we might want to hear, things that will flatter us. Yet those same people will then turn on us.

The good news is that Jesus, the Son of God, knows what it's like to be betrayed. Jesus can sympathize with us in our weakest moments. He knows what it's like to have someone close to him turn on him. He understands. And Jesus was and is always a real friend. He doesn't betray us. He rebukes us openly with his words. He tells us hard truths that we may not want to hear. We need to follow Jesus' example in not betraying people by acting one way to them at one

time, and then turning on them the next. Jesus is faithful, the one who never betrays but who was betrayed.

The next thing we should see in this passage is that those who betray, those who are aligned with the powers of darkness, don't fight fair. At the end of this passage, Jesus says that those who came to arrest him were doing so with the power of darkness. They were doing what was evil. And evil doesn't play by the rules. Jesus' enemies should have arrested him in Jerusalem, during the day, in public. Jesus says that they could have done that. Every day that week, he was at the temple, teaching. They could easily have arrested him then if they thought he was a threat. Instead, they come secretly at night. And though Jesus never committed acts of violence against anyone, he was treated like a violent criminal. The word "robber" used here in verse 52 is one used of violent criminals, not mere thieves. Why are treating Jesus this way if he's not a real threat? Because they want to get rid of him. Darkness doesn't like the light. It hates light because light exposes the truth. Light reveals what is done in secret. So, the powers of darkness come upon Jesus. It is their hour.

The third thing we should see is that there are two different responses to Jesus' arrest. One response comes from the other eleven disciples. They ask Jesus, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" Before he answers, one of them takes a sword and cuts off one of the ears of the servant of the high priest. In John's Gospel, we're told that the disciple who did this was Peter. John also gives us the servant's name, Malchus (John 18:10). We can understand why Peter would want to fight. He's trying to protect his teacher, his leader.

But Jesus has a very different reaction. He says, "No more of this!" Then he heals the servant's ear, which is the last miracle he performs before he dies. He refuses to fight back. Even though the people who come against him are wrong and want to do him harm, he refuses to run away from his mission. He must die. In John's Gospel he says to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?" (John 18:11).

Jesus could have defended himself. He certainly had the power to do so. Look at what happens in Matthew's account of this episode. This is Matthew 26:51–54:

<sup>51</sup> And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. <sup>52</sup> Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. <sup>53</sup> Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? <sup>54</sup> But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?"

Jesus could have responded by calling upon thousands of angels. Twelve legions could be as many as 72,000. He could have struck down all of the Jewish leaders opposed to them and all their servants and soldiers. But he didn't. He let himself be arrested so that Scripture would be fulfilled. He knew that he had to drink the cup of wrath that his Father had prepared for him.

Not only does Jesus refuse to fight back or run away, but he heals his enemy. He doesn't respond to hate with hate. He doesn't respond to swords with swords. He responds with love. Earlier in Luke's Gospel, he taught about loving one's enemy. This is what he says in Luke 6:27–29:

<sup>27</sup> But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. <sup>29</sup> To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either.

We could believe that what Jesus does here is extraordinary. We know that he has to be arrested, because he has to die. He has to die and experience God's wrath in order to pay the penalty for sins. Of course, Jesus never committed any sins. He is the one perfect human being. So, he's not dying for his own sins. He's dying for the sins of all who will come to him in faith, those whom the Father draws to him, those who cling to Jesus because he is their only remedy for sin. If Jesus didn't die for sins, we all would have to die for our sins. And we wouldn't just have to die a physical death. We would have to die a spiritual death. We would be condemned, cast out of God's creation, cut off from all of God's blessings.

So, we could easily say, "Yes, of course Jesus didn't fight back. He had to die." And then we could act quite differently when we are attacked. But we can't just write off Jesus' actions as something that he had to do, but something that we don't have to do. We just read his words: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also." When someone mistreats us, we will be tempted to strike back. If someone lies about us, we may be tempted to lie about them. If someone calls us a name, we might be tempted to call them names. If someone does something unethical towards us, we might think we're allowed to do the same to them. But Jesus says, "No."

Jesus' message is reiterated by the apostles. Let's look at what the apostle Paul writes in his letter to the Romans. Turn to Romans 12:14–21:

<sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. <sup>17</sup> Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup> If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” <sup>20</sup> To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

If someone persecutes you, you must bless them and not curse them. Do not repay evil with evil. Instead, do what is honorable. Don't avenge yourself, but leave it to God to deal with those who have wronged you. God will deal with all evil. In the end, all evil will be punished. Those who have turned to Jesus in faith have already had all their evil punished. Those who reject Jesus will stand before him in judgment and they will have to pay for what they have done. We must trust that a final day of justice will come. We don't have to try to right every single wrong in this life. Instead, treat people kindly. Overcome evil with good.

Paul can say those things because the Spirit of God led him to write those things. And Jesus spoke through his apostles by means of the Holy Spirit. So, Paul's words are no less authoritative than Jesus' words. His message is the same as Jesus'. Paul can tell us not to repay evil with evil, but to love and bless those who hate and curse us, because he knows that justice will be done. He can also say those things because God has instituted an authority that does provide justice. Paul goes on to say in Romans 13 that the “governing authorities . . . have been instituted by God” (Rom. 13:1). The government is “God's servant” who “bear[s] the sword.” The government “is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer” (Rom. 13:4). According to the Bible, the main role of government is to punish evil and to protect those who do good from those who do evil. Obviously, governments don't work perfectly. The Roman Empire wasn't the perfect model of justice in Paul's day, but Paul realized that the role of government was to punish evildoers. And if the government failed to punish evil, as it so often does, then evil would ultimately be punished by God. And that means Christians do not have to pick up weapons to avenge themselves.

Why does this matter? There's a great temptation today to rely on power to get our way. It seems like all kinds of people are obsessed with politics because they realize that if their party has control of the various branches of government, they can then enforce their will on all the

people. It seems like hardly anyone cares about truth and doing what is right. Instead, they cheer on the party that can enforce their agenda, regardless of whether that agenda is entirely good or not.

Christians have been caught up in this. I think we have been led to think that if only we could get control of the government, we could enforce our views on the nation. Now, that's understandable. It matters who is in power. And it matters what laws are made and enforced. Laws cannot enforce virtue in the hearts of people. But laws can restrain vice. And laws are teachers. When the government says that something is legal or illegal, it is saying that something is acceptable (even if it's not entirely moral) or that something is beyond the pale and is entirely unacceptable. So, we cannot pretend that politics doesn't matter.

But I think there are some things that we fail to think about. One is that Christianity cannot be enforced or spread through power. We can't make people believe in Jesus, or accept the doctrines of the Bible. Christianity can only be spread through persuasion and through the power of God.

Think about this: the early church had no political power. Christianity was an illegal religion. And it was considered a threat to the Roman Empire because Caesar, the emperor, was regarded as Lord. But Christianity said, "No, Jesus is Lord." Jesus is the real King. The Roman Empire had many, many gods. Christianity teaches that there is only one true God. So, Christianity was at odds with the Roman Empire. And for about three centuries after Jesus died and rose from the grave, the Roman leaders were not Christians. Eventually, in the fourth century, Christianity became a legal religion and then even the official religion of the Roman Empire. But that was not the case in the early years. The first Christians had no political power. They weren't the richest people. But Christianity spread through persuasion. Christians stated what Jesus did and how he fulfilled the promises of the Old Testament. They explained how all the other gods couldn't save them, and that they were in fact false gods. They pointed out the beauty and the coherence of the Christian faith while pointing out the inferiority of other beliefs.

You simply can't spread Christianity with force. To try to do so is wrong. Enforcing religion is more or less the way of Islam. Islam started in Saudi Arabia in the early seventh century. After Mohammed died, in 632, the alleged revelations of God that he received in his life were written down and codified in the Qur'an. And before long, the first Muslims engaged in

military conquests in the Middle East and across northern Africa, all within the seventh century. By the early eighth century, Muslims invaded Spain.

Now, it's technically true that people didn't convert to Islam through violence. We don't have accounts of people being told, "Confess Allah or you will die!" But Islam wouldn't have spread without violence, force, and great social pressure. Those people who were not Muslims and who lived in lands that were conquered by Muslims were treated as second-class citizens. They were forced to pay taxes that Muslims didn't have to pay. There was enormous social pressure to convert to Islam. And that is still true today in Islamic countries in the Middle East.

But that is not the way of Christianity. It can't be, because you can't force someone to have a change of heart. When we try to enforce what we believe, it simply doesn't work. And it often creates a backlash. People resent being forced to live in a way they disagree with. Powerful social movements in our country have not been achieved through power. Part of the reason why the civil rights movement in the '50s and '60s of the last century worked so well is because it was accomplished through persuasion and through people being willing to be arrested and even to suffer mistreatment. Of course, Christians can and should agree that treating someone poorly based on their skin color or ethnicity is wrong. It's a failure to treat someone as an image bearer of God, regardless of what they believe and how they live.

But there have been social movements in our country that do not align with Christianity. And they, too, have been spread not with violence or power, but with persuasion. We can think about homosexuality and now transgenderism. These movements have been spread through subtle means of persuasion. I don't think there are good arguments to state why homosexual desires and behaviors are acceptable. I don't think there are good arguments to say why we should believe that a biological man can be a woman, or a biological woman could be a man. Logic and truth are not on the side of people who advance such causes. But these movements have learned how to play upon the emotions of people. They have used media well, introducing characters in television shows and movies who were non-threatening, appealing to people's sense of freedom, to the idea that we should be free to love whomever we want, however we choose.

If Christianity is going to counter such movements, it cannot do so through political power. That won't succeed. We must engage in a battle for hearts and minds. We must present Christianity as a more beautiful alternative. We must persuade people that truth is on our side.



We must show them through our acts of love that we care for them and want what is best for them. And I trust that what the Bible teaches about sex, sexuality, gender, and the family will be shown to be true and wise in the end. That may take a long time. In the interim, we must love and persuade.

The other reason why we can't fight spiritual battles with political power and literal weapons of war is because, ultimately, this is a spiritual battle. This is what the apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:3–6:

<sup>3</sup> For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh.  
<sup>4</sup> For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. <sup>5</sup> We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,  
<sup>6</sup> being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

Paul's message was opposed by many people. It was opposed by Jews who refused to see that Jesus was their Messiah, the one who fulfilled the promise of the Hebrew Bible. It was refused by Gentiles who didn't want to turn from their idols to the true God. And it was even refused by people who claimed to be Christians yet who taught false things about Jesus. Paul realized his battle was not against people. Ultimately, it was against spiritual forces of evil, led by Satan himself. The weapons he used were not swords and clubs. He used reasoning and persuasion. He clung to the truth. He didn't destroy people, but he destroyed arguments and opinion that were against the knowledge of God. His punishment wasn't physical, but conducted through church discipline, using the censure of the church as a way of telling people they are wrong.

If you're familiar with Ephesians, you may recall that Paul told Christians to "put on the whole armor of God" (Eph. 6:10–20). It's a metaphor for finding our protection in Jesus. Most of the elements of that armor are purely defensive. The only weapon is "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17). And right after that, he tells us to pray (Eph. 6:18). Our weapons to fight against evil and darkness are the Bible, prayer, faithfully obeying God, reasoning with people, and trusting in the power of the only One who can destroy darkness.

We need to learn how to fight against spiritual darkness with spiritual light. Instead of relying on political power, we must draw on God's power by using the resources he has given to us. That's why it's so important to know the truth of the Bible and understand it well. It's our "sword." We don't use the Bible to beat people up, but to show that what they believe is false.

We must learn how to reason and persuade, and to do so in love. We must rely on God's power, and ask him, through prayer, to deliver us from evil.

And we must be willing to suffer if that's what God has called us to do. According to Paul, Jesus "disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him" by dying on the cross (Col. 2:15). He defeated evil through suffering. He triumphed by dying. Martyrdom has often been a powerful way of persuading people, because when people see someone dying for a cause, they start to consider that such a cause is worth dying for. Who would die for something they believed to be false? Who would die for something that they didn't believe was important? The word "martyr" literally means "witness." When we suffer for the sake of Jesus, we're bearing witness to the world that Jesus is worth more than the world's pleasures and comforts.

So, let us follow Jesus. He knows what it's like to be betrayed. He knows that the forces of darkness are real and that they don't fight fairly. Yet he knows that we can't respond with hate and evil. We must respond with love. We must respond with blessings, not curses. And we must respond in faith. The gospel message teaches us that evil isn't something outside of us. It teaches us that we have evil within us. And it also teaches us that Jesus died for evil people, that those who come to him in faith have their evil defeated, and that those who come to Jesus can love others who act in evil ways toward them. Trust in Jesus and follow in his footsteps.