

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Miracles of Jesus	Pastor/Teacher
Number:	9	Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Matthew 26:51; Mark 14:47; Luke 22:50; John 18:10	
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THE HEALING OF MALCHUS' EAR

This event is recorded in all four gospels. Only Luke describes the miracle, and only John tells us that Peter was the disciple who swung the sword that inflicted the wound. All four gospels tell us the name of the man who Jesus healed.

- I. **THE SCENE.** “Jesus’ arrest is full of pathos. The many persons involved reflect the full array of responses to Jesus. The event itself is told in three quick movements. First, the exchange with Judas provides its note of betrayal and hypocrisy. The arrest occurs as this *friend* draws near to give the teacher a customary kiss of greeting. Second comes the disciples’ attempt to defend Jesus with the sword, an approach Jesus explicitly rejects. Third, Jesus rebukes his captors while he acts to heal the severed ear of one of his arresters. Jesus shows his love for his enemies to the end (see 6:27-35). Even at his arrest, he controls the flow of events. As the hour of the power of darkness comes (v. 53), Jesus faces it directly and in love.”¹
- II. **THOSE INVOLVED.** Although St. John speaks of *the band* by a word (*speiran*) which always designates a *Cohort*, in this case *the Cohort*, the definite article marking it as that of the Temple – yet there is no reason for believing that the whole Cohort was sent. Still, its commander would scarcely have sent a strong detachment out of the Temple, and on what might lead to a riot, without having first referred to the Procurator, Pontius Pilate. And if further evidence were required, it would be in the fact that the band was led not by a Centurion, but by a Chiliarch, which, as there were no intermediate grades in the Roman army, must represent one of the six tribunes attached to each legion. This also explains not only the apparent preparedness of Pilate to sit in judgment early next morning, but also how Pilate’s wife may have been disposed for those dreams about Jesus which so affrighted her. This Roman detachment, armed with swords and *staves* – with the latter of which Pilate on other occasions also directed his soldiers to attack them who raised a tumult – was accompanied by servants from the High-Priest’s Palace, and other Jewish officers, to direct the arrest of Jesus. They bore torches and lamps placed on the top of poles, so as to prevent any possible concealment. Whether or not this was the *great multitude* mentioned by St. Matthew and St. Mark, or the band was swelled by volunteers or curious onlookers, is a matter of no importance. Having received this band, Judas proceeded on his errand. As we believe, their first move was to the house where the Supper had been celebrated. Learning that Jesus had left it with His disciples, perhaps two or three hours before, Judas next directed the band to the spot he knew so well: to Gethsemane. A signal by which to recognize Jesus seemed almost necessary with so large a band, and where escape or resistance might be apprehended. It was – terrible to say – none other than a kiss. As soon as he had so marked Him, the guards were to seize, and lead Him safely away.”²

- III. **THE EVENT.** “The contrast of Peter and Judas in this paragraph heightens the difference in the characters of the two men. Judas arrived with armed men to capture Jesus; Peter drew arms to defend Him. Judas apprehended Him by stealth; Peter defended Him openly. Judas betrayed Him in cold blood; Peter attacked Jesus’ enemies. In this account Jesus treated Judas with silence; He rebuked Peter sternly. Judas’ crime was deliberate throughout; Peter’s blunder in drawing the sword was prompted by a loyal though mistaken impulsiveness. The chilly indifference of unbelief and the erratic action of a belief which had not yet reached stability were alike destructive.”³ It should be noted that Peter’s actions were extremely scandalous and illegal and were punishable as criminal. “A good man’s hand,” writes Spurgeon, “is never more out of place than when it is on the sword hilt; yet there is always a tendency, even among Christians, to draw the sword from its scabbard. It would have been far better if Peter’s hands had been clasped in prayer. That act of cutting off the ear of Malchus helped to identify him as one who was with Christ in the garden and directly led to one of his denials of his Lord (John 18:26, 27).”⁴ Peter’s swordsmanship was as bad as his judgment. “The blow was as clumsy as Peter’s courage was great; the tactic was as pointless as Peter’s misunderstanding was total. John agrees with Luke in noting that it was Malchus’ *right* ear that was severed, and with Matthew in recording Jesus’ command to put away the sword (*cf.* also Je. 47:6). But in Matthew this command is followed by a paraenetic conclusion: *for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.* Here John’s report focuses all the attention on Jesus Christ himself: *Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?* Peter’s bravery is not only useless, it is a denial of the work to which Jesus has just consecrated himself – and entirely in line with the Synoptic evidence as to the failure of the disciples to comprehend the passion when it was announced to them (Mk. 8:31-33 par.; *cf.* also Mk. 14:36; Jn. 12:27-28), though the emphasis here – firm resolution to accept what the Father gives him – better reflects the *outcome* of the prayer in Gethsemane (*not my will, but yours be done*) than the agonizing supplication that secured it.”⁵
- IV. **THE MIRACLE.** The man Peter injured was not simply a face in the crowd. Malchus was a servant of Caiaphas, the high priest. “It is an entire consistency with all else which we read, that this fact should have come within the circle of St. John’s knowledge; for he, in some way not explained to us, was acquainted with the High Priest (John xviii. 15), was so familiar with the constitution of his household that he is able to tell us concerning one, who later in the night provoked Peter to his denial of Christ, that he was *his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off* (ver. 26).”⁶ With blood dripping down the side of Malchus’ face, Jesus now said to the soldiers, *Suffer ye thus far* (Luke 22:51). This expression is difficult to translate. Morris helpfully explains, “Jesus promptly forbade this swordplay, though the precise meaning of the words He used is not clear. It is not even beyond doubt whether He was speaking to the disciples or the soldiers (*cf.* Goodspeed, *Let me do this much!* which presumably is addressed to the arresting party). But the former is nearly certain. Jesus does not speak to the arresting party till verse 52 and His words here *answer* (RSV omits this verb, but it is in the Greek) the actions of the disciples. They mean something like *Permit until this*, which might mean *No more of this!* (RSV) or perhaps better, *Let them have their way*, but this is perhaps not quite so likely. At any rate Jesus made it clear that He wanted no fighting and He went on to demonstrate this by healing the wounded man with a touch.”⁷ Our text says that Jesus *touched* Malchus. The Greek word is *aptomai* and literally means “to firmly grasp, to hold tightly” and this pictures Jesus aggressively acting midst the chaos. Immediately Malchus’ ear was healed.

CONCLUSION: If anyone wishes to know what kind of person this Jesus had proved himself to be during the slightly more than three years of his public ministry, let him read such passages as Mark 1:39; 10:13-16; and see also Matt. 4:23-25; 11:25-30; 12:18-21; Luke 22:49-51; 24:19; John 6:15; 18:11, 36, 37; Acts 2:22. To say, as some have done, that Jesus was “harmless” is putting it too mildly. He was and is “the Savior of the world” (John 4:42a; 1 John 4:14), the world’s greatest Benefactor. How absurd and hypocritical it was for the foe in the hour of darkness to pounce upon this Good Shepherd, from whom no one who heeded his message had anything to fear, and who even taught people to love their enemies! See Matt. 5:44. By addressing the crowds in this manner Jesus was in reality doing them a favor. He was exposing their guilt. Is it not true that it takes confession of guilt to bring about salvation? Though it is a fact that the great majority of those who heard Jesus speak these words hardened themselves in sin, we have no right to conclude that the message, together with other messages that followed (for example, the seven words from the cross, Peter’s Pentecost address, etc.), was completely ineffective. See, for example, Acts 6:7. The impression left upon us by these words of our Lord is that they were spoken in a calm and earnest manner. To be sure, Jesus rebukes, but at the same time he is even now seeking the lost, that he may save them. Luke reports that Jesus added: **But this is your hour and the rule of darkness.** This was the hour – that is, the predestined hour (see above on verse 22) – in which the powers of darkness had their own way with Jesus, always, however, subject to God’s overruling providence!⁸

ENDNOTES

¹Darrell Bock, *Luke: The IVP Commentary Series* (IVP, 1996), p. 357.

²Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah II* (Longmans, Green, and Co., 1899), p. 542.

³Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief* (Eerdmans, 1948), p. 256.

⁴C. J. Spurgeon, *Matthew: The King Has Come* (rpt. Revell, 1987), p. 388.

⁵D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According To John* (IVP, 1991), p. 579.

⁶R. C. Trench, *Notes On The Miracles and The Parables of Our Lord* (rpt. Revell, 1953), p. 487.

⁷Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Luke: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Eerdmans, 1974), p. 313.

⁸William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Luke: New Testament Commentary* (Baker, 1978), p. 988.