



The Garden Of Gethsemane

Christianity has been fighting with the culture and losing for the majority of my time here on earth. Starting with Roe vs. Wade, followed by the removal of prayer and the Ten Commandments from the schools, and no fault divorce becoming the law of the land, the family and children came under serious attack. Prior to this there was the theory of evolution which was a direct attack on the Genesis creation account. The latest attack on the Genesis creation account is the gender confusion of maleness and femaleness, with the cultural idea that we are not what we are born, but rather have a choice in our gender regardless of whether God made us male or female. The ultimate rejection of God as creator on a personal level. Unfortunately as Christians, we have focused on pushing back against the cultural symptoms, rather than focusing on the actual problem, which is a lack of faith. We see this tendency illustrated in the Garden of Gethsemane, when they come to take Jesus away:

While He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a large crowd with swords and clubs, who came from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he who was betraying Him gave them a sign, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him." Immediately Judas went to Jesus and said, "Hail, Rabbi!" and kissed Him. And Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you have come for." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him.

*And behold, one of those who were with Jesus reached and drew out his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. Then Jesus *said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?"*

At that time Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me as you would against a robber? Every day I used to sit in the temple teaching and you did not seize Me. But all this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures of the prophets." Then all the disciples left Him and fled.

Matthew 26:47-56

When those who were around Him saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" And one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus answered and said, "Stop! No more of this." And He touched his ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders who had come against Him, "Have you come out with swords and clubs as you would against a robber? While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me; but this hour and the power of darkness are yours."

Luke 22:49-53

Simon Peter then, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear; and the slave's name was Malchus. So Jesus said to Peter, "Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?"

John 18:10-11

Reading in the Gospels in the mid 2000's, I came to the story of the Garden of Gethsemane for the twentieth or thirtieth (or even possibly fiftieth or sixtieth) time and I thought to myself, I have read this so many times, there is nothing more to learn from this, and I skimmed through it just to read through it one more time. Little did I know, God heard my thoughts, and within a week His Spirit spoke to me regarding this attitude I displayed, and He gave me new understanding and appreciation for the depth and richness of His word. Driving in my truck that week just past the railroad tracks by my house, He showed me that when it looks to us like a scripture is "played out", there is still much to learn from it that we have not seen or understood yet.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, they have come to take Jesus away. Peter draws His sword and starts swinging, cutting off Malchus's ear. His natural response is to fight to save Jesus, but Jesus says no, telling him to put the sword away. Then Jesus Heals Malchus's ear, and tells the disciples to not resist. Jesus informs them that if He wanted things to happen differently, He has plenty of Angels standing by to assist. What is happening is part of God's plan.

Similarly, our culture has come to take Jesus away. Our culture has taken God out of creation, taken prayer out of the schools, legalized abortion, legalized no fault divorce, legalized same-sex marriage, introduced gender confusion, etc. Our natural response has been to fight, just like Peter. Fight to save Jesus. How's that been working out for us? How would it have gone if the disciples had fought in the Garden? Would any of them have lived? Probably not. The Romans were better trained, better equipped, outnumbered them, had all of the power and authority. They likely would have been slaughtered. And that is pretty much the story of us, evangelical Christians, fighting against our culture today. Fighting to save Jesus. Since the Scopes Monkey Trial, it has been one defeat after another.

Notice that Peter's blow cuts off Malchus's ear. Is that a coincidence? Maybe, but maybe not. What do we do with our ears? We listen, we hear. Once our ears are gone, we can't hear as well. Have you tried witnessing to a gay or lesbian person lately? Give it a shot and see how that goes for you. Odds are they can't hear a word you are saying, because their ears have been cut off by all of the Christians (Peters) that went before you. Jesus immediately heals Malchus's ear in the story, and similarly, that is what we need to do today when sharing our faith with the un-saved. We need to heal their ears so they can hear the word of God again, rather than getting out our sword and inflicting further damage.

Jesus also tells His disciples that what is happening must take place, that it is part of God's plan. As hard as it may be for us to see what God is doing in the culture around us, we must always remember that what is going on will ultimately lead to God's glory. No matter what it is, no matter how bad it may be, it will ultimately lead to His glory. Like the story of Joseph, the world may mean it for evil, but God means it for good. The Garden of Gethsemane was the beginning of the Passion, Christ's crucifixion. Out of Jesus Crucifixion came salvation to the world, the greatest thing that has ever happened on planet earth. Out of the ashes of the Holocaust came

the nation of Israel. Like a mighty river flowing downstream, no amount of obstacles can stop God's plan from being accomplished. But we do have a choice in how we get to God's plan.

In the story of Jonah, God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach. He does not want to go, so he actually travels in the opposite direction. But Jonah ends up in Nineveh anyway, against his will. I often tell my four sons that we are all going to Nineveh, but how we get there is our choice. We can go by boat, or we can go by fish, but we are all going to Nineveh if it is God's will for our life. It will be a much nicer trip to go by boat, and it is our choice how we get there, so by all means I recommend we choose the boat. But the choice is ours to make. This is an illustration of the balance between free will and predestination, and the role that obedience to God's word and the leading of His Spirit plays in our life.

If we had taken all of the energy, all of the money, all of the time, etc., that we have put into fighting the culture over the last fifty to sixty years, and put that same amount of effort into prayer, evangelism and discipleship here in America, I do not believe we would be facing the issues we are facing today. In some ways, we, evangelical Christians, have chosen to go to Nineveh by fish rather than by boat. By choosing to fight, instead of choosing Matthew 28:19-20, we are partly responsible for the cultural situation we are facing today.

If we had turned to prayer instead of politics, things might be quite different today. If we had focused our energy on evangelism instead of political action, or discipleship instead of debate, we might be living in a different world. We cannot fight with the culture and expect to win, just as the apostles could not have won a fight with the Roman soldiers at the Garden of Gethsemane. The culture always wins that battle. Our path to victory lies in the gospel.

Look at how the early church won Rome. Not with swords, but with the Godly example of their lives, and deaths. They cared for the sick when no one else would. They rescued the babies that no one wanted. They walked singing to their deaths at the coliseums of Rome, counting it an honor to be found worthy to suffer for the sake of Christ. We can barely get people to show up for a prayer meeting today, much less do street evangelism or commit to discipling a new believer.

So what are we to do, knowing this? How are we to live? The word from the Spirit regarding the Garden of Gethsemane was prayer, evangelism and discipleship. Pray for the Lord of the harvest to send laborers out into the field. Tell everyone about Jesus, about salvation, about the gospel. Don't fight with them, rather share God's compassion and love for them. Use every occasion as an opportunity to share the gospel. And specifically, heal the ears of the unsaved who have been hurt in the fighting, as Jesus did. Tell them that you do not hate them (they probably think that you do), show them that you care about them, etc. Rather than sitting across from them in an adversarial position, sit next to them, and look out onto the world together. They are innocent bystanders, just as Malchus was, wrong place and wrong time, and they got hit by a sword. See the world through their eyes, be on their side, show them compassion. That is what Jesus would do. It is what He wants us to do.

We must remember that when Jesus was here, the only people he really was hard towards was the religious people. He showed nothing but love, compassion, grace, and mercy for everyone else. Jesus came to save people, not nations, not cultures, not institutions, not societies. He said “render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s, and unto God what is God’s” when asked about paying taxes. We have been fighting to “save our nation” for the last fifty years, when we were called by Jesus to “love the lost” and fight for their salvation through prayer, acts of service, evangelism, discipleship, etc. We must see our role as loving the lost, not fighting with them over ideas, philosophies, politics, etc.

It is time to get out of the fish, walk into Nineveh, and preach the good news. It is time to stop fighting with the culture and start witnessing to the culture about Jesus. It is time to stop looking to politicians to “make America great” and to start looking to God to reach the lost with the gospel. I challenge you to share the gospel with one person this week. I encourage you to start discipling someone if you are not doing so already. I challenge you to pray for an awakening in America, that America would not “be great”, but be “born again”. (There is someone in the bible whose goal was to be great, and he is not someone to follow, see Isaiah 14:12-15).

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18-20

Lord God almighty, we come to you in Jesus name and confess that we have not focused on prayer, evangelism, and discipleship but rather have fought and argued with the lost over the cultural issues of our day. Forgive us for looking to politicians rather than looking to You. Forgive us for putting our hope in government rather than putting our hope in the gospel. Forgive us for pushing for changes in the laws rather than praying for changes in men’s hearts. Forgive us for fighting to “save Jesus”, and in so doing we have cut off the ears of hundreds of thousands of people, people you died for. Forgive us for this sin, Lord God almighty. We ask that You would give us the opportunity to heal their ears, to share the love of Christ with them, to share the gospel with them. We pray for a great spiritual awakening in America, a move of Your Holy Spirit in the land. Go before us and prepare the way. Teach us to follow the apostle’s and to put the sword back in its sheath, to focus on the gospel and establishing the kingdom of God. Let this begin with me. In Jesus name we pray.