

In high school I was involved in several stage performances... with live orchestras... including “*Fiddler on the Roof.*” ... Our small community loved the production and every cast member were celebrities around town for quite some time. ... But my senior year... the music department decided to have another “go” at it and build upon the previous year’s success. The community expected another quality production... and as performers... so did we.

From its opening night... however... the production very much resembled an illustration that H.G. Wells once used in an essay that he used as a tirade against God. Wells declared that:

...The world is like a great stage production, directed and managed by God. As the curtain rises, the set is perfect, a treat to every eye. The characters are resplendent. Everything goes well until the leading man steps on the hem of the leading lady’s gown, causing her to trip over a chair, which knocks over a lamp, which pushes a table into the wall, which in turn knocks over the scenery, which brings everything down on the heads of the actors.

I don’t think anyone from the musical that I was in... considered that it was directed and managed by **God** – but the rest of H.G. Wells description is fairly accurate of the humiliation that we (and our audience) experienced. ... I am happy to report (however) that it was not ME who “*stepped on the hem of the leading lady’s dress...*”

(That was a sophomore named Kevin Holgate... NOT that anyone cares or even remembers after all these years... No. Every detail has been happily forgotten. ... Completely! ... PERIOD! ...It happened after a rousing dance number of performing the Charleston... with 1920’s hair... dress and fashion... big smiling faces... swinging each partner under their legs and high into the air... doing a back flip and two side twists.)

O.K. 'nuff said... Thank you... Mr. Wells for reminding me of it. ...
(Anyway...) with such a frenzied scene in our minds... allow me to continue
with Well's illustration... and the point he makes from it.

Meanwhile, behind the scenes God, the Producer, is running around, shouting orders, pulling strings, trying desperately to restore order from chaos. But, alas, he is unable to do so! ... [P A U S E] ...

Poor God! All He wants is a good show. But according to H.G. Wells... He is such a little god... very limited... and an extremely poor world-stage manager!

H.G. Wells is not the only influential and intellectual writer to think this way. Albert Schweitzer (the famous turn-of-the century genius — an accomplished musician on the organ...a medical doctor... missionary to Africa... and a radical theologian)... believed this. ... In his landmark book *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (1906)... he claimed to have ended the century-long search for the historical Jesus. ... Here is his conclusion in one of the most celebrated paragraphs in historical-critical theology:

There is silence all around. The Baptist appears, and cries: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Soon after that comes Jesus, and in the knowledge that He is the coming Son of Man He lays hold of the wheel of the world to set it moving on that last revolution which is to bring all ordinary history to a close. It refuses to turn, and He throws Himself upon it. Then it does turn; and crushes Him.... The wheel rolls onward, and the mangled body of the one immeasurably great Man, who was strong enough to think of Himself as the spiritual ruler of mankind and to bend history to His purpose, is hanging upon it still. That is His victory and his reign.

Albert Schweitzer... after reading such Biblical accounts that we come to today... and others) ... concluded that the historical Jesus was nothing more than a mere man. "*His mangled remains now flop like a rag doll on the wheel of the world.*" ... Those are his words...

So... we have **THIS** - and H.G. Wells' vast influence on many modern-day thinkers... to believe God is the director and producer of a stage production that got out of control.

The passage that we are studying in Luke's gospel certainly seems to support the conclusions of these two human authors. ... Is this not what apparently had begun in the Upper Room? ... The meal had peaked when Jesus held up his cup and declared: "*This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you*" (in v. 20). Jesus issued a promise of a new heart and forgiveness of sins... through His blood... that was about to be shed for us.

But that evening *Judas* had **refused** Jesus' extended morsel of friendship and went out into the night to complete the deal he had made with the powerful enemies of Jesus. ... Judas had expected a different Messiah... a Messiah with a sword. ... He had looked for a revived Israel riding high on horses and camels as a dreadful army to slaughter the Romans. He had expected the Messiah to sit on the throne of David with the universe as a cushion under his feet.

Meanwhile... still inside the upper room... the Eleven fell to infighting like children in a sandbox — egos puffed with imaginary greatness. ... Jesus tried to prepare a boasting-Peter with a prophecy that Peter pridefully rejected. ... And the Upper-Room conversation ended with the disciples' misunderstanding the Lord's instruction for advancing His kingdom, "*See, Lord, here are two swords.*" His tone seems a little annoyed when Jesus responded "*That is enough.*"

Then... in the Garden... unbelievable emotion gripped Jesus... so that great amounts of sweat fell from His body like warm blood gushing from an

artery and pooling on the ground. As that happened... Jesus asked His Father to find another way if possible. ... (You sure have to admit) that it looks as if Jesus' well-laid plans had gone awry.

So... did the stage production get out of control? ... Is Jesus still hanging on the wheel of history? ... We know that many people (today) think along those lines. ... (And) if we ever succumb to it... what hope can we possibly have in times when the events of our life seem “topsy-turvey” ? ... The good news is that further revelations from our passage today (distinctly) shout otherwise. H.G. Wells... Albert Schweitzer... and anyone who has believed them could **NOT** be any more wrong!

We can be confident that the Lord remained in full control and we can find hope and encouragement for our own chaotic periods... that can seem too far out of control to serve any good purpose.

We are about to see (in contrast to the use of force and the threatening attitude of those who arrest Him)... Jesus exercised compassion... healing the ear of a wounded – **ENEMY!** In doing so He displays an IMPOSSIBLE love (the supernatural kind of love that requires God's enabling.) It is beyond human ability – but Jesus exhorted ALL of His followers to show it.

Luke 6:27-33 (ESV)

²⁷ “But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. ³¹ And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. ³² “If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.

The time of darkness has come... but Jesus continues to love. ... (As we read the passage – notice how Jesus is the **dominant** figure... even though He submits to the Jewish authorities and faces both trial and death. **HE is in control.** Jesus agonizes and yet moves God’s plan along. ... He will not allow **anything** to prevent God’s will.

Luke 22:47-48

By comparing other Gospel accounts of the arrest... some figure the count of this “*multitude*” to be **five hundred or more.** ... This was a great contrast to the number who were with Christ. He only had eleven disciples with Him. Doesn’t this picture a general truth that has always been the case? Those who are against Christ will always outnumber those who are for Christ. But popularity does not validate good or evil. (The majority are often wrong.)

Judas abandons Jesus. ... Judas’ sin was **selling Jesus.** ... Put another way - Judas is the person who follows Jesus **when it profits**... but sells him off **when it costs.** (Do you know anyone like that...?) ... Judas follows Jesus when it looks like it’s going to profit (when it looks like there’s a chance of power... and when it looks like there’s a chance of prosperity)... but as soon as it looks like there’s going to be a cost to this... he sells Jesus off. That’s the sin of Judas.

Satan treated Job (in the Old Testament) as if he had the same sin that Judas did (indeed) have. ... In the book of Job... Satan comes to God and points to Job and says: “*Job does not serve God for nothing.*” ... Satan accused Job of being Judas. Satan is saying, “*You think Job is your servant. He’s not. He’s only a manager and not a servant.*”

The way you can tell a difference between a servant of God and a manager (whether you're a servant of God or a Judas)... is... when the storms come up and everything gets bad... and it looks like it's going to really cost you to obey... you sell your relationship to God off.

Satan was saying to God:

*“Look at Job. He isn't serving you. He's trying to get **You** to serve **him**. ... He is not really a follower of You. He is a manipulator of You. He's not serving You. He's using You. He's not after the Blesser. He's only after the blessings. Let me take away Job's health and wealth and you will see what he really is.”*

We all have a “*Judas-tendency*.” The disciples knew that they had it in them - to sell-out on Jesus. In the upper room when Jesus said one of them would betray Him... each of them asked: “*Is it me?*” (They would not have asked this... UNLESS they knew that it possibly COULD be.)

Anyone who knows their own heart... (probably) knows there is a part of them that could sell Jesus off when it starts to cost. ... There is a small part of them that says: “As long as things are going well - it's great! ... As long as things are going well - I like to believe. ... As long as things are going well - I like being a Christian.” ... (LISTEN)... Every believer needs to look at themselves. ... How have you done with the tests God has given you? When the storms come... (and they will!) do you have a quick readiness to sell Jesus off? Do YOU have any likeness to Judas?

Danger lies in an UNwillingness to admit our sinful nature and our need for God's continuous grace – which (alone) is what sustains us ALL! Don't trust your own strength to hold you close to Christ. Admit your INability ... and that you are dependent on His grace to sustain you.

Judas abandoned Jesus. Many of those (who are in church every Sunday) are ready to abandon Jesus... as they (foolishly) trust their own strength to keep them from doing it. ... A lot of us are (dangerously) on the brink of abandoning Jesus. ... Don't forget this before we move to Peter and the other disciples who remained with Jesus in the upper room.

The sin of Judas not of the sin of outsiders. This is a sin of the insiders. This is the sin of people who are active. The person who can commit a "*Judas' sin*" is a person who can lay a kiss on Jesus' cheek. (Somebody who is in close.) Somebody who is an insider. This is sin for us insiders. This is the sin of people who read the Bible. This is the sin of a Christian leader (Judas - an apostle).

So... please look at yourself. Is the sun out (right now) in your life? (No storms currently)? Does this allow you to be active with your Christian faith? Are you thinking: "*Boy, I'm a real follower of Jesus! Look at me... doing so well*"? ... Get ready for your test. ... "*Judas, do you betray me with a kiss?*"

Despite the diabolical betrayal... Jesus reached out to Judas... much as He had done at the Last Supper. (Even though he was Satan's agent)... Judas was still a lost soul... and Jesus always cares about lost souls. The question Jesus asked combined foreknowledge with an appeal for repentance: "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" ... Jesus attempted (by the probing) to get the conscience of Judas working. ... It was a poignant appeal. The kiss was a most disgusting means of betrayal. It represented Judas as a friend when he was actually a foe.

“Judas, how could you have chosen such a sign? Could you not have employed another way? Are you so dead, so beyond feeling, that you would use a kiss?”

Jesus is in control. Jesus exercised compassion in reaching out to Judas.

Luke 22:49-50

John 18:10 tells us that it was Peter who cut off the servant's ear. ... Peter made a number of serious mistakes. Peter had been sleeping when he should have been praying... talking when he should have been listening... and boasting when he should have been fearing. ... Now he was fighting when he should have been surrendering!

Furthermore... Peter (and the others) were fighting the wrong enemy with the wrong weapon. Our enemies are not flesh and blood... and they cannot be defeated with ordinary weapons.

2 Corinthians 10:3-6 (ESV)

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

Ephesians 6:10-12 (ESV)

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Peter (and company) also revealed the wrong attitude and trusted the wrong energy. While Jesus was surrendering... Peter and the rest were busy declaring war! And they were depending on “*the arm of flesh.*” Their

whole approach to the situation was not at all Christlike and stands as a good warning to us today. The lost world may act this way... but it is not the way God's servants should act.

The disciples' behavior is carnal commitment (that is... acting and struggling in the flesh.) ... The disciples took their stand for Jesus *in the flesh*. Therefore they failed... and eventually they deserted Jesus.

(LISTEN!)... **Acting in the flesh will always result in failing and deserting Christ.** ... The disciples' *carnal commitment* is seen in four mistakes. Each mistake is too often seen in the life of believers.

1. The disciples misunderstood the Lord's Word. First... they thought Jesus was to establish an earthly kingdom. ... They thought in terms of the earthly... the physical... the material. ... Therefore... they *failed to grasp the spiritual and eternal kingdom* proclaimed by Jesus. Second... they never accepted the Lord's Word. Jesus had predicted His death and forewarned the disciples... giving them extensive training for months (We saw this over and over in our study through Luke). ... Yet they refused to give up their preconceived ideas to accept what Jesus was saying. Therefore... they did not see the eternal world of the Spirit nor the eternal salvation which Jesus was securing.

2. The disciples did not wait for instructions from Jesus. They acted on their own, took matters into their own hands. The disciples had asked: "*Lord, shall we strike with the sword?*" But Jesus had not yet answered. However... this did not stop them - they went ahead and acted on their own. ... Wow! This is just like so many of us... isn't it!? ... Too often... we act without waiting on the Lord.

3. The disciples did not ask Jesus what to do. They did not *persist* until Jesus answered.

1 Chronicles 16:11 (ESV)

¹¹ *Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually!*

That is (exactly) what Christ had asked them to do when they got to the Garden of Gethsemane.

Luke 21:36 (ESV)

³⁶ *But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”*

4. The disciples thought God’s Kingdom depended on their own might and power.

Zechariah 4:6 (ESV)

⁶ *... Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.*

Peter’s brash move with the sword is both comical and inspiring. Perhaps Peter thought that now that the first blow had been struck, the Lord would call down fire from heaven or summon a cohort of angels. Maybe it was Peter’s way of making good on his boast that he would stand for Jesus at all costs.

Something about the whole episode is ludicrous. Peter did not strike a soldier but a slave - the high priest’s servant – Malchus (who the Gospel writer *John* identifies.) ... Even then... it was wholly ineffective. No doubt... Peter intended to cut off the fellow’s head... but all he did was smite off his ear!

There was certainly no lack of heart on the part of Peter and company. Swordsmanship aside... Peter was a good man to have on your side.

A soldier who served under George Washington (nicknamed “Mad” Anthony Wayne) is alleged to have told Washington: “*General, I’ll storm Hell if you lay the plans.*” ... (But... as acknowledged already)... the problem with Peter was that he did not listen to plans. He was more like the taxi driver who missed the directions and only heard the words “*and hurry!*” so he took off at high speed in the opposite direction of the destination. When the passenger asked, “*Do you know where you’re going?*” he answered, “*No, sir! But we’re going there very fast!*”

Peter’s move was pure stupidity. He was playing perfectly into the hands of the temple mob. Thanks to Peter’s impulsive violence... the authorities could now write in their official report:

We received an anonymous tip that Jesus and his armed followers were preparing for some guerrilla action. ... And when we responded... we were challenged... Jesus’ gang attacked us... We took their leader... and the rest are on the run. ... This Jesus? We now have proof that He was just a political subversive.

- Good job, Peter!

Peter’s blunder had yet another grievous implication because of something that Jesus was (later) to tell Pilate: “*My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place*” (John 18:36).

Luke 22:51

If it wasn’t for Jesus’ immediate mending of Peter’s errant sword-work... Jesus would not have been able to make the claim that His kingdom was not of this world. ... Peter’s courageous violence was at cross-purposes with the divine plan. Peter’s reaction was natural... the all too natural

reaction of mere human nature... unprepared by prayer. ... Peter's embarrassing *faux pas* would never have happened if he had heeded the Master's words: "*Pray so that you will not fall into temptation.*" ... Our human nature... unprepared by prayer... gets us into so much trouble!

Only Luke - the physician (of all the Gospel writers)... records the healing of the ear. ... It is just like Jesus to act in grace... when others are acting in malice. ... He showed grace to Peter by rebuking his presumptuous sin... and repairing the damage he had done. ... He showed grace to Malchus (a lowly slave... and an enemy) by healing his ear... Jesus did not come to judge but to save!

Our Lord's last miracle before the cross was not a big flashy thing that attracted attention. It is likely that very few of the men who were there that night even knew what Peter and Jesus had done. Jesus could have summoned twelve legions of angels (Matt. 26:53), one legion (6,000 soldiers) for each of the eleven disciples and one for Himself... but He did not. Instead of performing some spectacular feat... He lovingly healed the ear of an obscure slave and then presented His hands to be bound. ... Is this a man being crushed on the wheel of the world? ... Jesus controlled the circumstances of the arrest with majestic calm.

Such an action also makes clear that Jesus is no threat to the state. He has no desire to engage them in battle. If they wish to show that Jesus is a dangerous revolutionary... this act shows that the charge cannot stick. ... Jesus is in control of events... even in the midst of his arrest. He is "Lord of the situation." ... Anyone with wisdom would have stopped the process of arresting Jesus (immediately)... but rejecting Christ greatly diminishes any person's wisdom.

Luke 22:52-53

Judaism has organized all of its official elements to stop Jesus. By now... “the chief priests and captains of the temple and the elders” showed up. (Ironic!) - They were the very people who **should have** taken the lead in welcoming to earth the Son of the living God!

Christ did not resist the arrest, but He did rebuke the arresters. ... On the sixth day before the Passover... the Lord had approached Jerusalem from Jericho... entered the city... and cleansed the temple. ... Why had they not arrested Him then?

On the fourth day before the Passover (our Palm Sunday)... He rode boldly into Jerusalem as the Messiah. ... Why had they not arrested Him then? The next day... He had cursed the fig tree... entered the temple... and faced their hatred. ... Why had they not arrested Him then? ... Again... the next day it was the same. ... Why had they not arrested Him then?

Instead... under cover of darkness and with numbers of people tagging along and marching men fully armed... they arrested Him. ... Why did they not arrest Him in broad daylight? ... Why wait until dark?

Jesus also objected to their using the cover of night and His private location to arrest Him. If their charges were legitimate... they should have had no problem seizing Him in public on any given day He taught in the temple. His phrasing is significant: “*The power of darkness*” has double meaning... referring to the secrecy of their nighttime arrest and their service to the forces of evil. ... The Jewish leadership arrests Jesus not in public but in

private, not as a teacher of God's way but as a violent revolutionary. They act for darkness.

I wish that more Christians recognized the "power of darkness." It is such a real thing in churches today. ... I think there would be a whole lot LESS church splits – if people recognized that Satan needs darkness and hiding... in order for him to do his dirty work. Whenever action for any ministry needs to be discussed in private (under the cover of darkness) – let that be a "red flag" to you! Question it. Because discussing God's will for an action – most often can be done in the open and without hiding. ... Those who divide ministries do their work where the people who should be involved cant see or hear them. ("Now keep this a secret...")

Sometimes church leaders do need to investigate matters in private – to make sure unfair accusations don't infiltrate the ministry. Investigations that involve many people break ministries into factions. I am not talking that. More often than NOT... a proper discerning of what happened needs to be investigated privately – without involving everyone. That is prudent. No. I am talking about un-official huddles that are done in a hush-hush manner.

I am not saying this because I suspect any of this is going on in this church. But I have seen it in too many churches – and I always wish that people would be suspicious of any un-official "hush-hush" group meeting that has to be made under the cover of darkness. Let **THAT** tip you off that it is Satan's work – if you are ever invited to participate in one. ... Ask if proper church leadership is involved in the discussion that is taking place. The power of darkness that Jesus spoke of (in verse 53)... exists and is one of Satan's most often used way to demolish so many churches.

The power of darkness and those who oppose Christ may have an hour... (Jesus declared: “this is your HOUR and the power of darkness...”) - but that will be all. ... Darkness only has a moment of triumph. The Light of the world will overcome ALL darkness for an eternity!

Jesus WAS... Jesus IS... and Jesus WILL BE – in control. It looked like chaos to H.G. Wells and Albert Schweitzer... but they must have ignored the details of the passage we have been studying.

Your life right now might look like hopeless chaos... but God is in control THERE too. Here is how to find victory.

Each of us must decide whether we will go through life pretending - like Judas... or fighting with fleshly weapons - like Peter... or yielding to God's perfect will (even when it costs) - like Jesus!