

Chapter 79

The work of the traitor

John 18 vv 2 and 3

Look, a troop of soldiers is leaving Jerusalem in haste. The dull thud of many footsteps on the hard ground, and a hollow echo disturbs the quietness of night for a moment. The swords of the Roman soldiers make a rattling sound. Yet, if we look carefully we see that they are not all Romans. No, among the group some Jewish men are also to be seen. They are the servants of the Sanhedrin — of the chief priests and Pharisees. These Jewish servants were not allowed to carry swords; for that was forbidden by the Romans. So they are armed with staves. Some of them carry torches and lamps to give them light if it should be needed. The flames of the burning torches blaze high.

Quickly they descend the hills and make for the dark garden of Gethsemane. A Roman captain and certain High Priests and elders of the Jews lead the group.

Now, what is going on here? ... Is there some danger about? ... Has war broken out, and is the enemy close to Jerusalem's gates?

No indeed! In the whole of the far-flung Roman Empire at that moment peace reigned. No, that is not the reason.

What then is the meaning of this night journey? ... Well, they have to go and capture a dangerous man. A deceiver, a rebel! That is why they are so heavily armed - for safety's sake, you see. Who is this deceiver then? ... Who is this rebel? ...

Now, you just say, boys and girls. This

dangerous man is ... the Lord Jesus. At least, they think that He is a dangerous person.

In front, so as to show this band of fighting men the way, there walks a man. A cruel smile curls his lips and his eyes sparkle maliciously. This guide is Judas, one of the followers of the hated Nazarite. For just thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave, he has sold his Master. Now he is on the way to take the Lord Jesus prisoner.

The Pharisees and Scribes are overjoyed at the thought that this hated Seducer will soon be dragged off by them as a captive. Oh, so long as He doesn't escape just at the last moment. So long as He hasn't fled. That would be a pity, for then all their trouble will have been in vain. They must really fall upon Him suddenly, they must take Him by surprise. That would be ideal, for then He would have no chance to flee.

And if it had to come to a fight, well, they are strong enough. The Roman swords will make a quick and gory end to any resistance. The Roman soldiers are used to a great deal. They would strike down without mercy any who dared to stand against them.

The elders of the Jews had been sitting peacefully at the Passover feast that evening, when they had suddenly been disturbed by Judas. In a voice trembling with malice he had informed them that now was a suitable time to lay hands on Jesus of Nazareth. Now they have the greatest chance of success.

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And indeed, they are not anxious to let this fine opportunity slip by. Though it means disturbing their feast, never mind, it's got to be done.

With the greatest possible haste a group is made ready. They evidently had informed the Roman Captain that Jesus was trying to stir up the people against the Romans. Perhaps they assured him that there was danger of uproar. That is why there are Roman soldiers present too.

Look, they are already approaching the dark garden of Gethsemane. But ... they must not capture the wrong person. That would be no good. But then, how are they going to recognise the dangerous Nazarite in the dark? ... No problem! Their leader, their guide, Judas will ensure that no mistake is possible. They must all watch him. He will give Jesus a kiss, a friendly kiss! Then all will know whom they must take. And Judas, who knows Jesus so well, will make no mistake. Of course not, that is impossible.

Everything is arranged down to the last detail. In the garden they must spread out and search quickly, so that He cannot flee away. Their hearts beat with tension and the Roman soldiers take a tighter grip of their sharp swords.

Will they have success? ...

Matthew 26 vv 47-50

Mark 14 vv 43-46

Luke 22 vv 47-48

John 18 vv 4-9

"Whom seek ye?"

Dumbfounded, the whole band stands still at once. All stare in the greatest amazement at

the Man, who from the shadowy darkness under the close packed foliage of the heavy olive trees, steps forward and is now clearly visible to all in the light of the moon. Oh, but they had not reckoned with this, they had not expected it. Who is that? ...

Oh, some will probably have recognised Him, but the Roman soldiers do not in any case know who He is.

When they have recovered somewhat from their surprise, they answer: "Jesus of Nazareth". It is Him they are after. It is for Him that this expedition has set out.

Quietly and calmly the same voice answers: "I am He."

At the sound of those few words they all shrink back and ... Oh, just look. The whole band, the tough, intrepid Romans soldiers, the Jewish servants, the dignified members of the Sanhedrin, yes even Judas the traitor, all fall back. They all fall to the ground. No, they do not trip over in their haste to take Him, they do not fall forward, but they stumble backwards to the earth. It is as though a giant hand strikes them down.

But how does that come about? ... Oh, the Lord Jesus, the King of kings, lets them just feel a little of His divine power. He just shows them that if he is not WILLING, they can never take Him prisoner.

Of what use now are their swords and their staves? ... None at all!

They all fall flat upon the ground. Oh, if Jesus wanted to, He could now hasten away, He could make good use of their present state of astonishment, and flee. No-one would think of preventing Him at this moment.

But ... Jesus does not flee! He remains still and waits until they all stand up again. Were



Judas with the band on the way to Gethsemane

the warriors and servants ashamed? ... When they have recovered, the same calm voice is heard again: "Whom seek ye?" and again the answer resounds: "Jesus of Nazareth."

"I have told you that I am he," says the Lord Jesus and He continues: "If therefore ye seek me, let these go their way."

With these words the Saviour points to His disciples who are standing close by and who see all this with anxious, frightened faces.

And then? ... Oh, how mean! How cruel! Then Judas walks up to Jesus and gives Him a kiss.

"Hail, Master" says he in a pretence of friendliness.

Is it not appalling? How does he dare to do this?

And, does Jesus' eye blaze with indignation? ... Does He not with one blow cast the false hypocrite to the ground? ... That is what

the traitor deserved. Absolutely! That is what we would do, wouldn't we? We would be avenged of so much falsehood and meanness.

But the Lord Jesus does not do that. He looks solemnly at His unfaithful disciples and in soft reproach these words came from His mouth: "Friend, wherefore art thou come? Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?" ...

Do you hear that? He calls Judas even now a ... friend!

The traitor steps back. He has done his devilish work. The whole band now knows for certain that this quiet, calm Man before them is Jesus, it is Him they must have. They press forward impetuously to lay hands on Him.

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Matthew 26 vv 51-56

Mark 14 vv 47-52

Luke 22 vv 41-53

John 18 vv 10 and 11

"Lord, shall we smite with the sword?" say a few trembling voices nervously. His disciples, who as though paralysed by shock have so far looked on in silence, now begin to move. They see the serious danger in which their beloved Master stands. They see the false traitor. They are full of deep indignation. Oh, now they can see what their Master had meant, when He had told them that one of them should betray Him. They can understand it all now.

But ... they will help the Lord Jesus. They will defend Him. They make haste, and looking at Him in questioning anxiety, they are heard asking: "Lord, shall we smite with the sword?"

One of them, Peter, does not even wait for an answer. He snatches the sword which he is carrying, from its sheath, and smites with it blindly.

Suddenly a loud shriek pierces the night and one of the band puts his hand to his right ear in agony. The man's name is Malchus. He is a servant of the high priest. Peter has smitten him with that wild sweep of his sword. The right ear of Malchus lies on the ground. Blood flows from the wound. The ear has been cut right off.

Probably the others drew back a little before this onslaught, but the Roman soldiers are already preparing to strike Peter down. That is no longer necessary however. The Lord Jesus made an end of the strife with a few words. He commands Peter to put up his sword within its sheath.

Peter obeys at once. Surprised and not

understanding, he glances at his Master. Yes, vengeance wells up in his heart. Instead of Jesus helping him or being grateful to him, he is ordered to stop. He is not allowed then to defend Jesus? ... He steps back annoyed.

Peace is restored, but Malchus will be maimed for the rest of his life. He must go without his right ear.

But no. Look what happens. Jesus bends down. He picks up the blood-reddened ear from the ground and ... He heals Malchus completely.

Oh children, how deeply that whole band was put to shame. Here the "despised Nazarite" has mercy on one of His enemies. Moreover, He demonstrates by a last miracle, His almighty power. Even this is another loving warning to bring them to repentance.

What will have gone on in the heart of Malchus himself? ... We do not know. Will it have caused him to reflect? ... God's Word says nothing about that.

Jesus then turns to the elders and chief priests of the Jews and asks with holy mockery in His voice: "Are ye come out, as against a murderer, with swords and with staves to take Me?" (Mark 14 v. 48 - Dutch translation), it is as though He asks: "You seem to be somewhat frightened of Me. Why is that then? You are not seeing Me now for the first time. I was daily with you in the temple. There I taught the people, there I preached. Why did you not take me then?"

We read nowhere that the chief priests gave an answer to this question. They could not, for what Jesus had said was true!

"But this is your hour, and the power of darkness." the Lord Jesus concludes. He means: "This is the devil's hour, Satan is urging you on; the prince of darkness rouses you against Me."

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Oh, these dignified, eminent, "devout" Jews do not realise that they are instruments of the devil. The devil uses them to achieve his aim and they allow themselves to be used, but they are fully RESPONSIBLE for their deeds. They have been warned so often.

But... are you not also warned often enough? ... Are you not also having pointed out to you by God's servants time and time again, the only way of salvation? ... Does the Lord bestow on you too no love-work? ... How awful it will be if you neglect so great salvation. How terrible if you spurn the precious day of grace!

In spite of all that has taken place however the officers do not come to repentance. On the contrary, they advance upon the Saviour and lay hands on Him.

No! Jesus allows Himself to be taken. He gives Himself freely over to the band. He allows Himself to be bound by them. Perhaps He even held out His hands. As a lamb He let Himself be taken.

Look, there they take Him off, bound and shackled, as though He was the greatest evildoer. As though He was a thief or a murderer. How humiliating for Him.

And His disciples then? ... Where are they? ...

His disciples? ... They are cross! They very strongly object to their Master letting Himself be taken prisoner so willingly. They object to His having commanded Peter to put up his sword in its sheath. They are concerned about Jesus' behaviour. It really seems as though Jesus does not wish it otherwise. Well then, He should know. Then there is no more they can do either and ... annoyed, they take flight. They all leave Him.

Now is fulfilled already what the Lord Jesus had foretold only a few hours before. He had said, had He not, that they would all be offended because of Him? ... They had not then believed it, but it has happened already.

There is not one among them who understands why Jesus lets Himself be taken. Not one of them realises that Jesus must die in order to save them from everlasting ruin. How great is the love of the Lord Jesus for His people

Here too is fulfilled the prophecy of Zacharias when he says: "Smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered." By "the Shepherd" is meant the Lord Jesus, and by "the sheep" are meant the disciples. The Shepherd is smitten, is taken prisoner and the disciples are scattered.

So you see how everything was fulfilled to the letter.

Look, the band hastens back to Jerusalem. They have fulfilled the purpose of their night-expedition. They have got Him. The hated Nazarite is in their power. They had not once needed their swords and staves. Nobody had dared to suggest that it would have been so simple.

Judas is also to be seen among them. So then, now he is avenged, and moreover he has made some money.

The chief priests are smiling. They have got their way. At last, at last they have Jesus in their power. What fools! They do not know that it had to come to pass in that way! They are quite unaware that GOD IS FULFILLING HIS COUNCIL!