

Friday Communion Service

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Preacher: Marcus Florit

[0 : 00] Francisco de Quevedo was a Spanish poet of the Baroque era at the 16th, 17th century. And although I'm no poet at all, I've tried to translate a poem. I hope that he never gets to hear my version, but anyway, I've tried my best. It goes something like this.

Tonight, feelings are but darkness surrounding the most pure light. And the sun, paled in a dark shadow, cries to the fire and yells at the wind. For of death, the dark enclosure discovers trembling the grave. And the mountain crowning the plain of the nearby sea is watching, observing. Of stone it is, hardened man. Of diamond your heart. For death so severe does not fill with tears your face. But no, not of stone. No. For if it were in pity at seeing God so loving amidst the other stones would break. The poet was trying to express that reality, that amazement that people would actually see the dying Son of God and stand there, impossible. That people could stay, as we read somewhere in Scripture, just that they would just stand watching there. And that some of them, after being witnesses to those events, would respond with no response. How can a man, the poet expresses, how can a man, if he has a heart, observe impassable, the dying Son of God without breaking in many pieces? In the thought of the poet, not even a heart of stone could be so hard. Even stones break. It must be of the hardest known thing. Diamond itself, diamond which is so precious, becomes instead a symbol of the death. Man lives as he ignores the beauty of the cross. But then the poet even says, no, but not even the hardness of diamond can explain the mystery. How do we respond to the cross of Christ? How did people respond to the cross of Christ, to the Christ of the cross? Now, in the Gospels, we find the description of how some people responded to the cross of Christ. And this is what I like to do these days, to look at some of these individuals and what was their response to the Lord Jesus Christ.

We'll look a little bit at those who went to arrest Jesus, also at those who were involved in his betrayal. Judas, but also Peter. Those who participated in his trial, the Sanhedrin, Herod, Pilate, and finally, those that participated in his execution, especially the Roman soldiers. And this evening, I like to answer some questions relating to one of those present when Jesus was arrested. This man who is referred to as the servant of the high priest who had quite a remarkable experience, this man who we are told his name was Malchus. And as we answer these things, I would like to, at the same time, focus our minds on two things. One, the hardness of man's heart as it is revealed in this encounter, but also the strength or the power of God's grace. First then, let's try to identify who was this Malchus? And I like the name, not just because it sounds a little bit like mine, but who was this man? Who was Malchus? What did Malchus see is our second question.

[4 : 36] Then what did Malchus experience? And finally, what did Malchus do? And somebody could say, well, so what? What do these things have to do with us? Well, I hope that we can see eventually how these things have a lesson for us this evening. Who was then Malchus? Well, he was one of them who went to arrest Jesus, but he wasn't just one of them. Some details are given without saying too much in the Gospels. The first thing that we notice is that he is referred to as the servant of the high priest. Now, if you allow me to give you a very bad translation of both Luke and John, where this is affirmed, we could translate that reference as saying of the high priest, the servant. Or in John, the of the high priest, the of the high priest servant. You see, in the Greek language, the use of the article, the instead of just, well, the absence of the article, which generally we would translate as A. But the presence of the article may be very significant. It points to maybe somebody in distinction with others. It appears like this man was not just one of the servants of the high priest, but actually the man who was in command of the detachment that had gone from the high priest together with the Roman soldiers to arrest Jesus. Something else that we know that's quite remarkable in the narrative is that he is mentioned by name in John chapter 18 and verse 10. This is what we read.

Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. And the servant's name was Malchus. Now, and I think that this has to do something with one of the lessons that we can learn from this passage and we'll mention later on. But he's referred to using his personal name.

In John 18 again, we see how John went with Peter. John and Peter were allowed, eventually Peter too, but first John was allowed to enter the palace of the high priest. And most likely all that indicates that John was either of a priestly family or he was well known by the high priest, maybe due to his father's fishing business.

It looks like John himself had a house in Jerusalem. Remember that Jesus dying on the cross committed his mother to the care of the apostle John.

And we read that from that day he received her into his house. So, this man was somebody, I mean, as the gospel writers wrote about this man, they want us to remember not just what sort of office he had, not just that he was the servant of the high priest, but they want us to remember his name. Now, they don't want us maybe to remember his name, but they want the people that would be reading the gospels to know this man's name.

[8 : 03] He, as I said, was probably the one leading the party that went from the high priest as they went to arrest Jesus.

It wasn't a small group that went to arrest Jesus. It was a detachment of Roman soldiers and not a small one. At the time of the Passover, the city would be filled with a nationalistic spirit. There would be a desire to get rid of these Romans, these oppressors, and the governor would want to make very sure that things were kept in order. He was in Jerusalem at the time.

That would not have been his usual place of residence, but he needed to have hands on. He wanted to make sure. And in a situation like this, it was necessary to make sure that no trouble would come out of this event.

So, this is a little bit about Malchus. Not much, but I think, as we'll see later, I hope, relevant. Now, what did Malchus say? Will you turn to John 18, please?

For Malchus witnessed some remarkable things that evening. The first thing that we can say that Malchus witnessed was Jesus' authority.

[9 : 29] Look at John 18 and verse 4. Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, that is, to the people that were coming to arrest him.

He asked them, who is it you want? Jesus of Nazareth, they replied, I am he, Jesus said.

And Judas, the traitor, was standing there with them. Now, John mentions not only that Judas was there, he was standing there. They were all there present, ready to capture Jesus, ready to arrest Jesus.

And Jesus said, I am he. They drew back and fell to the ground. Now, that was not the usual way. First of all, one who knew was in trouble would answer. But certainly, that was not the effect, the response of a man would have on a strong armed police force.

[10 : 47] But the authority of Jesus, somehow, we don't understand every detail. And it would be for us futile to try to understand exactly why in every detail how things happened.

But the reality is that at the words of Jesus, those who went to arrest him couldn't stand. They went back and fell to the ground.

Not only he saw the authority of Jesus, I think, in the way that Jesus responded to them. But I think that also in the way that he allowed them to arrest him.

Verse 7, again in John 18. Again, he asked them, who is it you want? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Well, I told you that I am he.

It's me you want. Arrest me. But then, not only in the way that he allows them to arrest him without any sign of resistance, but in the way that he spoke to the captors about his disciples or the way that he spoke to his captors on behalf of his followers.

[12 : 03] Because, you see, that is there in verse 8. I think it's quite remarkable. I told you that I am he, Jesus answered. If you are looking for me, then let these men go.

Now, this is quite remarkable when we think that if you are a police force going to arrest the leader of a potential rebellion. If you are going to arrest the leader of a group of people that can be certainly a source of trouble, not just for the Jews themselves, not just for the high priests, etc., but also for the Romans at the time of the Passover, if there is something you want to make sure is that if you have the whole band together, you take them all.

You can send the police and find the leader and the followers and ask the leader, well, who's the leader here? I am. Okay, we'll take you. The rest can go.

Even more striking what happens eventually when, in verse 10, here in John also, we read about what one of the followers did. Now, he cut off the right ear of Malchus, but it's not after his right ear that he was.

He wanted to chop off his head. And to these men, Jesus speaks and says, well, let them go.

[13:38] Let them go. Now, you see, this is like somebody finding a person with a gun smoking in the hand, and somebody who's been shot on the floor, bleeding, and telling the police, oh, let him go.

Let him go. It's okay. If you want me, I'm the boss, but let him go. And this Malchus sees. Who is this man? Who is this man? Who is this man that can speak in this way?

Who is this man that when he speaks in this way, something compels us somehow to do something of what he says?

But Malchus witnessed also the spirit of forgiveness in Jesus. It's remarkable the way that we have read in Matthew 26 that Jesus refers to Judas, isn't it?

You see, one of the problems I think we have, especially if we have grown up in a Christian family, if it's been quite a number of years we have been reading the Scriptures, is that we know them too well.

[14:58] Sometimes I'd like that. I wish that we could sort of erase our memory for a moment when we come to a passage, and that it would speak to us afresh, like something we've never read before.

And then we come to this Matthew 26 and verse 49, and we find these words going at once to Jesus.

Judas said, Greetings, Rabbi, and kissed him. And Jesus replied, And this Malchus is witnessing, because he was standing there by the side of Judas.

And Jesus replied, Friend. Friend. The events that follow make very clear that Jesus was absolutely aware of what was about to happen.

I mean, things are not taking Jesus by surprise. And this man, Malchus, witnesses somehow the spirit in Jesus of a man who is being betrayed and still willing to address the betrayer, the one who leads those that will take him as friend.

[16:15] Malchus not only witnesses Jesus' spirit of forgiveness, but he is one that certainly would, and I know that this is a measure of inference, but I imagine that Malchus was one of those who would have heard the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ during those days.

This is what Jesus speaks, isn't it, in verse 56. Oh, I should say 55 at the end of verse 55.

Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. I imagine that Malchus, being somebody of some importance in the high priest's service, would have been amongst those that would have heard the teaching of Jesus.

He would have been needed as one of the witnesses of the prosecution. Maybe even as one of those that were sent on an occasion, and that came back saying, we've never heard anyone speaking like this man spoke.

So this is what Malchus witnessed. But then what did Malchus experience personally in his own life? Well, certainly Malchus experienced not just the love of Jesus for his enemies, not just the care of Jesus for his friends at asking that they would be let go, but certainly Malchus is experiencing the compassion of Jesus for himself.

[18:05] For we know how we read in the gospel in Luke chapter 22. Luke chapter 22 and verse 50.

When Jesus' followers, 49, when Jesus' followers saw that it was going to happen, they said, Lord, should we strike with our swords? And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

But Jesus answered, no more of these. And he touched the man's ear and healed him. Now, this is the man that's leading the police force that's going to arrest Jesus.

A man who is victim to the desire of one of Jesus' friends to defend their master, their teacher.

But this man sees how Jesus, the one that is going to be arrested, cares for him so much that heals him, restores him to health.

[19 : 12] Now, as far as we can read this, this must, I don't know what happened. Again, because you see, all that we read in verse 51, or all that we read in verse 50, I should say, is that one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.

The ear was off. And then in verse 51, at the end we read that Jesus touched the man's ear and healed him. Now, what happened there?

We cannot be absolutely certain. But it gives me the impression that for a moment, the ear wasn't there. And that at the touch of Jesus, the man was made whole again.

Now, this Malkus experienced in himself. This is Jesus touching my life.

This is Jesus, not just touching my life, but touching my life for good, for blessing. And so the last question is then, what did Malkus do?

[20 : 28] Well, obviously, he became immediately a disciple of Jesus and one of his defenders. Well, not really.

We know that this is not what he did. He took Jesus prisoner, and he took Jesus prisoner to be killed. We read that several participated in mistreating Jesus during the trials of Jesus, and we have no reason why to doubt that Malkus probably was more or less involved in that mistreatment of Jesus.

He kept silent during the trial of Jesus concerning the authority and the power of that man.

And he certainly handed over, handed Jesus over to Pilate, where eventually Jesus would be sentenced to death.

It's very interesting that when Jesus was taken over to Pilate, the Jews that took him, we better read it, Matthew 27.

[21 : 58] Matthew 27 at verse 1. Matthew 27 at verse 1. Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death.

They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate, the governor. But, you see, as they did, we know the Gospels tell us that they did not want to enter into the governor's palace because they were afraid that they would be defiled.

They were still worried about their religious obligations. And there is no doubt that Malkus probably was one of the officers that was part of taking Jesus to Pilate.

And we react. Maybe in your minds we react and say, how is that possible? I mean, how could a man that has witnessed what this man has witnessed, a man that has seen what he has seen, a man that he has experienced what he has experienced in his own life about the good hand of Jesus for him, would respond in that way.

Because that was Malkus' response to the Christ of the cross, the hardness of his heart.

[23 : 43] You see, it's like what the poet said that I read at the beginning, of stone, a heart, a heart hard as stone, not as stone, as diamond.

the hardness of heart of a man who's saying what he saw, who experiencing what he experienced, responded with indifference, participating with those that wanted to mistreat him, participating with those that eventually led Jesus to be crucified.

but I think that the story does not end here. And again, if you go out this evening and say, well, Marcus has been inferring quite a bit tonight, well, maybe.

Maybe. But I think that I've got good authority for doing that. You see, in John 18, and John 18, verse 10, we read something that makes absolutely no sense.

Makes absolutely no sense to us. It's like if I were writing something that happened, I don't know, in Barcelona as I was growing up, and I was writing about a group of us who were going around and having a good time.

[25 : 24] Maybe we went to the football, to a football match one day. And I'm writing something something of a story of what happened. And I want you to read that story because I want you who know me to know what I was doing.

And then in the middle of that story, I put that friend of mine was was Albert. Okay. So what? He could say.

So what? If that friend of yours was Albert. Where is this Albert? Why are you mentioning his name?

But you see, maybe what happened is that I brought Albert with me last year. Last year, Albert was with me. And I'm giving now, I'm giving you now my story to read.

And in my story, I put this name. Oh, that friend, the one who stole the ball, you know, the football match, that name, my friend, was Albert.

[26 : 35] He would say, oh, yeah. It's the fellow that came last year with him, isn't he? And I think that there are several places in the Gospels where we find cases like this, names that are given that would mean to us absolutely nothing, but that most likely meant a lot to those that first read the Gospels.

Richard Bauchman, in a study entitled Jesus and the Eyewitnesses, wrote these words. There is no difficulty in supposing that the other persons who would otherwise be anonymous named in the Gospels became members either of the Jerusalem Church or of other early communities in Judea or Galilee.

You see, the reality is that there are other cases in the Gospels, names that appear here and there, and that would seem absolutely irrelevant, but there were people that most likely with time, by God's grace, the hardness of their heart was softened, and they came to believe in Christ as their Savior.

Maybe Malchus was one of them. Maybe one of those that at Pentecost was confronted with the reality, with the undeniable reality of the empty tomb and had to agree, yeah, that man I saw that night, that man who cared for me, even me, that night, that man is not dead anymore.

His tomb is empty. He truly is who they said he was. What will our reaction be to the Christ of the cross?

[28 : 38] Have you experienced his good hand on your life? His word of authority? His power in care?

His blessing in ways that you would not have imagined? How will we respond to the Christ of the cross? With a hardened heart, or by or will fall at God's cross before God in prayer?

We'll ask him, O Lord, soften my heart and make me a true disciple. Make me one who would want to follow Jesus no matter where he would go.

Let us close as we sing the words of Psalm 13.