

## **God on Trial: Restraint** (SJ/Zion- 2/14/24; Redwood - 2/21/24)

Luke 22:47-53 - While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him,<sup>48</sup> but Jesus asked him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"<sup>49</sup> When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?"<sup>50</sup> And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.<sup>51</sup> But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him.<sup>52</sup> Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs?"<sup>53</sup> Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour-- when darkness reigns."

Dear children of God:

You feel the pressure build in your chest. Heart rate, blood pressure, and body temperature rise. Respiration and perspiration increase. You've been wronged! And you want to do something about it—right now. What do you do?

On Thursday of Holy Week, Jesus and his disciples gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem. He told them he was about to be treated like a criminal. He also warned them that their lives and ministries were going to become more difficult. In the past, they had been welcomed into homes and accepted by people. From now on, they would face hostility.

It didn't take long for the disciples to get their first taste of that hostility. When the Passover meal was over, Jesus led his disciples out to the Garden of Gethsemane. You've heard what happened. A detachment of soldiers, guided by the Jewish leaders and led by Judas, came to arrest Jesus. The disciples were ready for action. Peter swung his sword and severed an ear. But Jesus rebuked them: **No more of this!** (Luke 22:51). And he healed the man's ear.

Jesus had done nothing wrong. And as he declared to the mob, he certainly wasn't engaging in the kind of violent insurrection that would call for a detachment of armed soldiers. If he had been guilty of some lesser misdemeanor, his enemies could have arrested him easily out in public on many occasions. But Jesus knew they had arrived under cover of darkness because they had no legitimate case against him. This was mob justice, bribery, and collusion at its worst. It was completely unfair. Today as we hear of Jesus on Trial, we learn how:

Jesus exercised restraint

1. Jesus had perfect restraint for us.
2. We have restraint because of Jesus

### **1. Jesus had perfect restraint for us.**

What did Jesus do? A man who can heal a severed ear has plenty of options in a situation like this. With one word, Jesus could have called down a legion of angels to defend him. John's account tells us that when the mob asked for Jesus and he said, **"I am he," they all drew back and fell to the ground** (John 18:6). With another word, Jesus certainly could have gotten rid of them forever.

But Jesus didn't. Instead, he healed a man who had come to detain him. He exercised *restraint*—perfect, holy restraint—for us.

Restraint is the ability to hold back. It's an aspect of self-control, and it's not easy—especially in circumstances when you feel wronged. How do you respond to unwarranted criticism? What's your first reaction when someone accuses you of doing something you didn't do? Or when people aren't listening or things aren't going your way?

Restraint is not typically our first inclination. Why is it so difficult? Because we tend to think of ourselves first: "How did this hurt *me*? What did *I* do to deserve this? Why didn't they think of *my* needs and how this would make *me* feel?" It's about our pride, our dignity, our sense of justice. We feel like we're on trial: we feel defensive—that we need to defend ourselves.

So the pressure builds—along with our heart rate and blood pressure. All we can think about is that we want to get rid of that feeling—wanting whatever we think will make us feel better. Maybe we don't swing a sword, but we lash out with our tongues. We fire off an angry text or e-mail or leave a bitter screed in the comments box. We give a glare. We fight back. We sin.

Jesus says, "No more of this!" Then he heals. Look at Jesus. He was not thinking about himself. He was not thinking about the fact that he had done absolutely nothing to deserve this or about what would make him feel better.

No, he looked at this man bleeding from the place where his ear used to be. Jesus saw him not as an enemy to be defeated but as a man with a soul and a name—Malchus, John tells us. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had said, **“Love your enemies.”** Now he showed his disciples—he shows us—what that looks like.

No, Jesus wasn't thinking of himself. He was thinking of you. The path to your salvation began with his surrender to this unholy mob in the garden.

Restraint is a theme in Jesus' passion. He stood in the garden as the perfect Lamb of God, the servant who never opened his mouth to hurt or raised his hand to harm but gave himself over willingly. His restraint was on display as he stood on trial before Caiaphas, Herod, Pilate, and their factions. They taunted, ridiculed, spat, struck, and scourged—and Jesus never once lashed out, lost his temper, or called down curses from heaven. Even as they nailed him to the cross, there was loving restraint: **“Father, forgive them”** (Luke 23:34).

We need this Jesus as our Savior. We need his quiet and purposeful obedience to his Father's will. We need his perfection, his holiness, and his righteousness to be able to stand before our Father, and that's exactly what Jesus came to give us by dying on the cross and rising from the dead.

## **2. We have restraint because of Jesus**

We need his example too. We live in a world where the quick comeback, the zinger response, and the demeaning answer are rewarded both in real life and on Twitter – or “X”. Talk shows and news channels thrive on inflammatory reports to gain more viewers and secure a loyal audience. Social media algorithms target our sense of indignation to get us to engage. When we live in a world like this, it can rub off on us. We begin to think that if we don't respond with the same level of venom, no one will listen. Thinking of the other person becomes far less important than making sure we are heard.

What if we did something different? A young man in his 20s was shot and spent months in a coma on life support before he died. A small group gathered at an old Lutheran church for his Christian funeral. It was time for the service to start, but his mom wasn't there yet. Finally, those in attendance heard screaming in the back of the church. It was the mother, hysterically yelling at her daughter and other family members. She was swinging her arms, threatening them, and calling them killers and murderers for making the choice to take her son off of life support, even though he had no chance of survival. Still screaming and threatening, she ran to the front of the church and fell on the casket. When the funeral directors came to close the casket, she began hitting them. After what seemed like an eternity for those present, she ran outside to the hearse—still screaming and crying and threatening. As she stood near the hearse, an attendee who didn't even know the mom walked up and gave her a hug. The woman whispered, “It was an honor to know your son. He was a good kid. It was a privilege to know him.” The mom's shoulders dropped, and her demeanor immediately changed. For the first time in a long time, there was quiet. Then another woman walked up and did the same. And there was grace. There was Christian love and restraint. That quiet act said more than all the screaming that preceded it.

Imagine the impact you can have in this overcharged world where restraint is a lost art. You know Jesus. You know the one who showed love and restraint all the way to his sacrificial death on the cross for sinners like us. You know Jesus who is in control of all things, working them for the good of his people. This means you can be different. You, we, all of us can use our words to heal and help instead of to inflame and destroy. We can think of the hurt others feel rather than the hurt they have caused us. We can respond graciously and not impulsively when we are provoked by those around us.

Behavior like this may be interpreted by some as weakness, but in fact it takes strength. It takes strength that can only come from our Savior who has walked the path before us. In the garden, Jesus' power was seen in his miraculous healing, but his strength was seen in his restraint. The world would say he had the right to fight back. There was no question he was wronged! But he set aside justice for himself out of love for us. What do you think Malchus thought of Jesus from that moment on?

When you are wronged, remember that you operate from a position of strength. God has declared you righteous and forgiven; you don't have to prove anything. His plan will prevail; you don't have to be in control. His Spirit fills you; you don't stand alone. You can be a light in this world where darkness reigns. Instead of fighting back, you can swing the sword of the Spirit—the gospel of Jesus. And maybe through your strange behavior and the message behind it, others will come to know Jesus' love. Amen.