

Not My Will: Submission - Sword

Genesis 3:22-24; Isaiah 2:1-5; Matthew 3:11-12, 10:34-39, 26:39b, 47-56; John 1:1-2, 14; Romans 5:18-19; Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12-13

In this series, we are going to explore symbols familiar with Jesus' journey to the cross and what they represent. Last week, we discussed the grave clothes from Lazarus to Jesus along with the powerful words: "Jesus wept." (John 11:35).

Today we are looking at the sword and how it is a symbol of submission.

The Sword of Division:

Read Matthew 26:47-56.) This was the moment that the disciples realized they had no idea what they were getting into. They believed he was the Messiah at this point, but they still believed that that Messiah was going to come and overtake the Romans and establish a physical kingdom in Jerusalem. I imagine that the disciples were prepared to take up arms to conquer by force, but not so much prepared to open their arms and submit in love.

Jesus' speech in the Garden of Gethsemane broke their brains and challenged all of their expectations of what they imagined the Kingdom of God is and how it would come to be. That one line "*for all who draw the sword will die by the sword*" changed everything.

The first sword appears when humanity does not submit to God. Read Genesis 3:22-24. It hit me when I was reading this scripture that swords had not been invented yet in the Garden of Eden. There was no need for it as a tool or a weapon. God provided for all of their needs so they didn't have to work or struggle for anything. The sword with the cherubim probably wasn't what we think of when we think of a sword, but it was probably something that served the same purpose.

The purpose of a sword is to cut, separate, and divide. When Adam and Eve chose their own way over God's way, they chose autonomy over trust. The Fall was ultimately their refusal to submit to God.

The cherubim was placed at the gate of the Garden of Eden with a symbol of division to mark the separation between God and humanity and guard the way back to the Tree of Life (aka... God's presence) all because they refused to submit to God's will.

Each time a cherubim is mentioned in scripture, they serve the same purpose of marking the division between God and humanity (The Ark of the Covenant, The Tabernacle, The Temple).

The Sword of Control:

When humans are separated from God, they begin to rely on force, domination, and power. Genesis shows the escalation quickly (violence, revenge, power struggles). The sword then becomes a symbol of human attempts to reclaim control on their own terms and in their own way.

"For all who draw the sword will die by the sword." In other words - anyone who chooses their own way over God's will live divided from God...and that is death.

So division (aka sword) = bad right? Not necessarily.

Not Peace, But a Sword:

In Matthew 10, Jesus gives instructions to the disciples before sending them out to spread the news of the Kingdom. Read Matthew 10:34-39. This has always felt very backwards to me.

Jesus said that he did not come to bring peace but a sword. He is not saying here that the sword He brings means that He is bringing violence, but instead division. He is not bringing physical division but spiritual division.

Sword of the Spirit:

Read Ephesians 6:17. The Sword of the Spirit is the Word of God which equals Truth. Truth divides: the just from the unjust, the obedient from the disobedient, and the submissive from the rebellious. Truth does not divide by physical force, coercion or violence, but through spiritual revelation.

Read Hebrews 4:12-13 and John 1:1-2, 14. Jesus is the living Word of God. The Word of God is the Sword of the Spirit. Therefore Jesus is the Sword of the Spirit Who came to divide the wheat from the chaff. Read Matthew 3:11-12 (John the Baptist is the speaker).

The battle that Jesus came to fight was not a physical battle. It is spiritual. He is fighting for hearts and minds with his weapons of truth and love.

The disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane were ready to take up arms, but they didn't understand yet how to fight the battle that was coming. They had not yet been baptised with the Spirit like John said they would be.

Recap:

In the Garden of Eden, humanity chose not to submit to God. A flaming sword was placed to guard the gate. It is a symbol of division between God and humanity.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, three times praying, Jesus says *"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. **Yet not as I will, but as you will.**"* (Matthew 26:39b) Jesus submits to God's will. He did what Adam and Eve did not do.

Jesus is the symbol of restoration between God and humanity. When he heals the ear that was struck by Peter's sword, He restores what the sword severed.

You have to feel a little bad for Peter here. He really believed that he was doing the right thing by picking up his physical sword to defend Jesus. It is human nature to defend and protect - by force if necessary. Then Jesus says this isn't the kind of battle we are here to fight because that isn't the kind of Kingdom He has come to establish. He tells them that he could call legions of angels to rescue him but he chooses submission...not to the soldiers, but to God's will.

Jesus didn't come to conquer, control, and kill those who opposed Him. He came to save them - to save us. Romans 5:18-19 says, *"Consequently, just as one trespass (Adam's refusal to submit to God's will in the Garden of Eden) resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act (Jesus' submission to God's will in the Garden of Gethsemane) resulted in justification and life for all people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous."*

Future Peace:

Because Jesus submitted to God's will in the Garden, we can live in hope that one day the sword (division) will fully disappear. Read Isaiah 2:1-5. This shows the future that God is moving history toward: a world where swords are no longer needed because God's reign is fully realized. But until that day, we live between Gethsemane and Isaiah's vision.

The Kingdom is already breaking in but is not yet fully realized. So the question becomes: How do we live now with so much division in the world? Isaiah said, “*Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.*”

While we wait for the future peace, we lay down our swords of control, we submit our will to God’s will, and we trust his wisdom over our own. Just like Jesus prayed in the garden, “*Not my will... but Yours be done.*”

Reflection Questions:

- Have you ever had expectations of God that turned out to be very different from how He actually worked?
- According to Hebrews 4:12, what does the Word of God do? Do you read God’s Word with an open heart to hear and understand God’s Truth?
- In Gospel of Matthew 10:34–39, Jesus says He came not to bring peace but a sword. How does understanding the sword as **spiritual division** change how you read this passage?
- Why is submission to God often harder than trying to control situations ourselves? What “swords of control” are you tempted to hold onto in your own life?