

Luke 22:35-38
Preparing for Tribulation

35 And He said to them, "When I sent you without money bag, knapsack, and sandals, did you lack anything?" So they said, "Nothing."

36 Then He said to them, "But now, he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one.

37 "For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: 'And He was numbered with the transgressors.' For the things concerning Me have an end."

38 So they said, "Lord, look, here are two swords." And He said to them, "It is enough.

I like to kid myself that I am a patient man, but one of the things that I just have no patience for any more is the assertion, that one hears all the time, that Christianity is just as violent and bloodthirsty as Islam.

All you have to do, is attempt to discuss the history of Islam and the doctrine of Jihad, and immediately people react defensively and say "well Christianity is just as bad as Islam in that respect" because of the *What? The Crusades of course!* In fact, I've actually heard it said that there wouldn't be any present day Jihad or Jihadists, if the Crusades had never been launched.

Now these contentions particularly offend me because they are both bad theology and bad history.

When we are talking about the crusades we are talking about a movement that started in the 11th century and ended in the 13th and which started after the Seljuk Turks took Jerusalem and most of Palestine from the Byzantines. The Byzantines (who were Greek Orthodox Christians) realized they could no longer hold back the Turkish Muslim forces, and so they appealed to the West and in turn the Pope issued a call for the Western Christians to liberate the so-called "holy land" and hold back the expansion of Islam.

Now as will become apparent, I am no apologist for the Crusades. As I hope we shall see, they were biblically indefensible. Christ does not teach that the Christian faith is to be spread or defended by violence. But, lets be serious here, when we are talking about the Crusades we are talking about something that:

- ended over 700 years ago
- started as a wrong reaction to Jihad
- which no Christian theologian in his right mind is trying to defend – quite the opposite they are universally condemned in the Christian community today.

Jihad, on the other hand started under the direction of the prophet Muhammad in the 7th century, and is still going strong today, almost 1300 years later. And Jihad, unlike the Crusades, has a solid foundation in the Quran.

I mention all of that because sometimes, these verses in Luke are appealed to, by enemies of Christianity, as some sort of proof text that Jesus told his followers to take up arms and spread the Christian faith by the sword in exactly the same way that Muhammad told his followers to spread Islam by Jihad, and of course led them in Islam's initial campaigns of conquest.

So is that what Jesus is saying here? *Go buy a sword and as you go preaching the gospel, kill everyone who rejects the faith!*

NO. Well then what is Jesus saying?

First, Jesus is issuing a warning that hard times are about to come upon the church. You remember that the first time, Jesus sent the Apostles out to preach in His name, He sent them out without purse, or knapsack, or even a change of clothing. This first time, they were "in training" and as far as their spiritual development was concerned, they were not yet ready for the hardship they lay ahead of them (remember that 11 of the 12 apostles were eventually put to death for their faith in Jesus) so they went out under divine protection and had their needs fully met along the way – they were received well by the villages they were preaching in, they had places to sleep, food to eat, they "lacked for nothing." He reminds them of that.

Tomorrow, though Jesus is going up to suffer and die. His time amongst them as teacher is coming to an end, now he is about to be taken, to be put through a sham of a trial, and then be crucified with common criminals, "numbered amongst the transgressors." Jesus is about to accomplish that which He came to earth to do, what are those lines from *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*? "Born that man no more may die. Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them second birth" Our Savior is about to do what he was born to do. If we sinners are to be reconciled to a just and holy God, then Jesus the only Son of God, must die in our place, to make atonement for our sins.

That atonement is about to happen, but it means that the time of their spiritual infancy and training for the disciples is coming to an end. The time is coming when - like troops who have been progressively trained and hardened for battle by facing increasing challenges with fewer and fewer resources - they will be sent out as sheep amongst the wolves to preach, and will have to be as "*wise as serpents and harmless as doves.*"

He is saying once again, the kingdom is not coming in terms of the political reign of a restored Israel under a new David as you are hoping, rather the kingdom will come as you carry my message to the four corners of the earth, and my dominion will be extended as heart by heart, men are captivated by the gospel and reconciled to God. But... it ain't gonna be easy. People are not going to receive you enthusiastically like they did before, and Jesus uses a figurative expression to say, "the next time you go" you must go prepared for the journey, prepared for the struggle.

So the use of the sword imagery is mostly figurative. Jesus is *not* saying prepare for the Christian Jihad! He has already sternly rebuked James and John in Luke 9 when they asked if they should call down fire upon the unbelievers, and in just a few hours he is going to rebuke Peter when he tries to defend Jesus with a Sword in the garden.

Nowhere does Jesus teach us to advance the gospel by coercion or conquest, in fact that would be contrary to the very spirit of the gospel. The gospel does not beat men into submission so that they enter the faith like cowed dogs, rather the true gospel has a power no physical sword has ever had. It is so sharp it can pierce the stoniest heart, and so powerful it can change that heart of stone into a heart of flesh so that a man, like Paul, or like me, who was once a hater of Christ and his church is transformed into one who loves him and would follow Him anywhere.

That said, there is a secondary and very minor application, namely this does answer the question “*may a Christian arm himself (if it is within the laws of the land) in order to defend himself from thieves and brigands?*” I would say that this and other verses indicate that this is certainly allowable. Even in the upper room on that final night, at least two of the disciples were armed, so Christ had not forbidden them to carry swords to defend themselves from robbers. As an aside here’s a question to chew on. ***Peter brought one of the swords, but who brought the other?***

And unfortunately, the disciples still don’t get it at this point, so when Jesus mentions “**swords**” it’s like when you say the word “walk” and the dog is in the room. “**Walk did you say walk? Are we going for a walk, here the door is over here, oh boy, oh boy, finally a walk!**” Sword? Did you say sword? WOOHOO! Now you’re talking! Finally the revolt is at hand! Look here are two swords to get us started!

How does Jesus react? That’s Enough! Enough of that talk... He cuts off the conversation at that point.

So what are the applications of these verses?

I want to make three applications:

1) **Christianity is not a religion that is spread by the sword**, in that respect it is as far removed from Islam as can be. Our Lord did not say, come take up your swords and kill, he said come take up your cross and die. We should be willing, like the Apostles, to lay down our lives for the gospel. To become martyrs if need be. And we need to understand that word martyr. The word “martyr” comes from the Greek *martureo*, it means “to bear witness” to “testify.” The Apostles bore witness to the truth of the Christian faith by their willingness to die for their testimony so they became “martyrs.” They and those who followed showed that at heart, the love of the Christian faith was so great, that men were willing to go to the arena, to be crucified, to be stoned to death, many saying like Stephen the first of the martyrs, “**Lord, do not hold this sin against them!**”

Now for men of action, like Peter at this point in the Gospel, this is a tough lesson. It means that no matter how frustrating things become, we don’t adopt a ***do evil that good may come of it approach***. It means that in fighting abortion we don’t blow up clinics and kill doctors, it means that in fighting slavery we adopt the methods of William Wilberforce and not John Brown. And it means as tempting as it might be, we don’t form Christian terrorist organizations of our own, even though terrorists are killing us. That’s hard, especially for Christians in areas where they don’t have a magistrate committed to protecting them or an Army to stand between them and the bad guys. (And believe me, not a day goes by where I don’t thank God that providentially the US does have such an Army.) We don’t form the Christian equivalent of Al Qaeda or Hamas because of what that would do to our witness.

I think that perhaps one of the most eloquent portrayals of the stark difference between Islam and Christianity, is that for us a Martyr is a man in the model of Stephen, for Islam a martyr is one in the model of Mohammed Atta who dies flying a plane into the World Trade Center.

2) ***Just as much as the disciples needed to, we need to prepare for tough times ahead.*** A sociologist by the name of Peter Berger once remarked that if India is the most religious country in the world and Sweden the least, then the United States is a nation of Indians ruled by Swedes. Christians, you may not realize this, but you have been nominated by the intelligentsia in our country, to play the part of the Nazis of the 21st century. Now at present, evangelicals in America only have to deal with bigotry and

soft persecution, but it may well be that you or your children face real persecution for their beliefs, here in America. That persecution of evangelicals is already legally occurring in Europe, and Australia, and Canada. Like the apostles we have had a time of training of preparation, a time when Christianity was at least outwardly well received. Now we are facing that time when bringing the gospel message will not be without a cost.

Now I say this to encourage to be ready to stand firm, as so many of your brothers and sisters already are in places like China and Sudan and Indonesia. Let me ask you, what would we have thought of the Apostles, if when Jewish society turned decidedly against Jesus and his message, they tried desperately to make the Gospel message more “Sanhedrin friendly” to knock off all the sharp edges and to maintain that there really wasn’t a difference between say a Pharisee or Christian and that both would end up in heaven? We would have called them *false apostles*. Well brothers and sisters, our society is once again saying we don’t like this message of Jesus as the Son of God, or that the Bible is his Word, or that he alone is the “way the truth and the life.” And a lot of Christians are reacting by *saying “Oh, you don’t like that, well how about this?”* You see many Christians have gotten so used to being accepted in the culture, that they will do anything to continue to be accepted, even if it means dancing to whatever tune the culture is playing.

3) *Why is this all this “standing firm” so essential?* Because we are stubborn? Judgmental? bigoted? NO! It’s Because of verse 37 - *“For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: ‘And He was numbered with the transgressors.’ For the things concerning Me have an end.”* **MUST BE ACCOMPLISHED** Jesus didn’t come to earth to merely be an example for us, or a great religious teacher. He came to earth to die on that cross as a substitute for us, a sacrifice for us, *He who knew no sin became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.* That one sacrifice by which we are cleansed from Sin was so essential that it was planned from eternity past. Only if you are cleansed of our sin by the blood of Christ, and stand robed in His righteousness on the last day, do you have any hope of heaven. Your hope is in the gospel that through faith in Jesus Christ you will be saved from you sins, no matter how great. Without that gospel, you can be the least of sinners, and still have no hope.