

## HERE ARE TWO SWORDS

*By Allon Maxwell*

When Jesus first sent out his twelve disciples, (and later, the seventy others), they were told to take nothing for their journey; no staff, no bag, no bread, no money; not even a second tunic. (Luke 9:3)

With this command, he set them free from concern about how they would be fed and clothed, while giving their whole priority to preaching the Kingdom of God. As labourers for the Kingdom, they were worthy of their hire, and they would lack nothing.

Later, in another setting, he reminded them of this with the question, "*Did you lack anything?*" (Luke 22:35)

Of course, they had to answer that they had indeed lacked nothing.

It was after receiving this admission that he said to them:

*"But now, let him who has a purse take it, and likewise a bag. And let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one."* (Luke 22:36)

It transpired that two of them had already done just that!

In spite of all the preaching they had heard from Jesus about turning the other cheek, it would appear that the disciples had now begun to think that they were in need of some means of self-defence.

Thomas, at least, seems to have indicated some concern for their safety, in response to the invitation from Jesus to go with him to Jerusalem, following the death of Lazarus. (John 11:16) Certainly, the raising of Lazarus precipitated a plot by the priests to put Jesus to death. (John 11:53) Thomas' concern was well founded.

Was this when they bought those two swords?

It does seem likely.

Peter had his sword with him at the Last Supper, when Jesus made that statement about buying swords.

John records another facet of what must have been the same conversation, when Peter affirmed his willingness to use his sword, saying, "*I will lay down my life for you*". (John 13:37)

Peter had lost his vision of the Gospel of the Kingdom, with its radical calling to love and bless enemies, instead of fighting to defend his own life.

Just a few hours later he drew that sword in a futile attempt to defend Jesus and was severely rebuked for his action. He should not have used it. He should not have been carrying it for such a purpose, and if he continued he would perish. (Matthew 26:52)

What did Jesus really mean when he made that statement in Luke about buying swords?

We have been conditioned by tradition to read the words in Luke as a new command, replacing an earlier one in Luke 9:3.

However, perhaps we need to remember that this interpretation of Jesus' words comes from a church that has been largely unfaithful in obeying the Sermon on the Mount; a church whose continued justification of warfare betrays just how little they have understood Jesus on this subject.

I suggest that this interpretation does not fit with the teaching of Jesus at all.

It is not in harmony with Jesus' own refusal to call angels to his defence.

Nor is it found anywhere in the subsequent teaching or example of the New Testament church.

Nowhere again in the New Testament, after that failure by Peter, do we read that those first century Christians bought swords, carried swords, defended themselves against persecutors, or made war.

I suggest that we need to think again about what Jesus really meant.

It would take only a minor adjustment in the TONE in which we hear Jesus speak those words, to completely change their meaning.

Jesus is not telling the disciples that he WANTS them to buy swords! Instead, His words are actually a reflection of what he now discerns in their hearts.

He is putting His words to THEIR THOUGHTS and contrasting their current BEHAVIOUR with His own earlier teaching.

He is challenging them to return to what they should have known, if they had properly understood all that they had heard him say and do.

This is NOT a new instruction, changing his earlier direction.

It is a REBUKE for their failure to remember their calling.

IF WE WILL RECEIVE IT, Jesus must have spoken in a *tone of voice* which delivered a stern warning against what two of the disciples had already done!

This is reinforced by Jesus' abrupt dismissal of the conversation with the words, "*It is enough*". (Luke 22:38)

Jesus had certainly seen those two swords before he spoke.

It must have seemed like a sword through his own heart to realise that, even at this late stage, the disciples had still not grasped his message about loving enemies.

To read this incident in any other way presents us with an impossible contradiction of the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount.

The Gospel of the Kingdom sounds a clear call for all to BELIEVE that they must now begin to love their enemies and turn the other cheek to the aggressor. It is the peacemakers who are the real children of God.

**PEACEMAKERS DO NOT CARRY SWORDS!**