

Did Jesus Really Tell His Disciples to Buy Swords?

As expected, the response to my article “Since When Did Jesus Get Connected to Guns?” was fast and furious, especially from those who failed to read the article.

Many adamantly defended their right as Christians to defend themselves, while others pointed to the Second Amendment, despite my stating explicitly that “I am not questioning our right to defend ourselves” and that my article was not “about the Second Amendment.”

Others pointed to Luke 22:35-38, where Jesus apparently told His disciples to go out and buy swords, telling them they had “enough” with the two they had on hand. For these readers, this was justification for carrying guns for self-defense (again, I never questioned someone’s right to own a gun for self-defense).

Some readers went even farther, suggesting this was the way to avoid persecution in the future. As Aaron H. posted on Facebook, “It’s because we value life and recognize God is a giver of life, we protect ourselves, and give warning to would be persecutors, we won’t stand for it, so we can have life. ... Whenever we are disarmed, we are slaughtered.”

Yes, he explained, “Martyrdom is a romantic fantasy. History tells us, first is disarmament, next it’s our Bibles, next it’s our lives. It does not matter if it’s guns, or swords. If guns did not exist, we’d cling to our sword or spears, and our Bibles.”

Another wrote, “The issue Dr. Brown is you cannot split our freedom to worship and our freedom to bear arms they are interconnected and they are supposed to be. Some people do not like this idea because they believe Jesus is a pacifist, He is

not.”

So much for Jesus calling us to turn the other cheek (Matt 5:38-42). So much for Him saying that it is the meek who will inherit the earth, the peacemakers who will be called children of God, and the ones who were persecuted for righteousness who are blessed (Matt 5:5, 9-12). So much for Him teaching that the world would treat us the same way it treated Him (Matt 10:25; John 15:18-20).

So much for Peter writing that we should follow our Savior’s example, noting that “when He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten” (1 Pet. 2:23). And so much for Paul explaining that “it was granted on behalf of Christ not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Phil. 1:29).

That was for the old days. Now we have guns! No one will persecute us.

To repeat: I respect the purpose of our Second Amendment and I do not oppose our right to self-defense. And I am not advocating new gun control laws. Despite the somewhat ferocious response to my article from some quarters, those were not my issues at all. I was simply questioning the cultural phenomenon here in America—in particular, in some geographical parts of the country—that associated the gospel with guns.

Of course, I knew that readers would point to Luke 22:35-38, which is why I also cited it in my article, suggesting that it was the wrong passage to use in support of gun ownership.

To review the context, Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, about to be betrayed, when He had this dialogue with His disciples.

“When I sent you out with no moneybag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?” They said, “Nothing.”

He said to them, "But now let him who has a purse take it and also a bag. And let him who has no sword sell his garment and buy one. For I tell you, what is written must yet be accomplished in Me, "And He was numbered with the transgressors." Indeed, what is written concerning Me has a fulfillment.

They said, "Lord, look, here are two swords."

He said to them, "It is enough."

A very small minority of scholars believe that the real agenda of Jesus was the violent overthrow of Rome and that this passage hints at His real strategy. But not only does this go against the entire testimony of the New Testament and early church, it also makes no sense contextually—unless you believe that Jesus was saying that eleven disciples armed with two swords were ready to take on the armies of Rome.

Others say that Jesus was simply telling them that the days ahead would be much more difficult than in the past, because of which they would need swords for self-defense. But if that was the case: 1) Why were two swords "enough"? 2) Why did Jesus rebuke Peter just a few minutes later for using his sword against the soldiers who came to take Him (Luke 22:49-51; Matt 26:51-52; John 18:10-11)? 3) Why didn't the disciples use their swords to fight against their persecutors in the book of Acts?

Using the logic of some of those who believe that being armed is the key to avoiding persecution, why did the apostles merely pray together for boldness to preach and for miracles to be wrought through Jesus' name when they were threatened (Acts 4:24-31)? Why didn't they plot a strategy of fighting back with their swords? Wasn't this what Jesus was telling them to do in Luke 22?

The fact is that the passage in Luke 22 says nothing about

self-defense, other than noting that two of the disciples carried swords, something that was not uncommon for Galileans to do to protect themselves from thieves. That would be the equivalent of a Christian today having a gun at home in case of a home invasion. So if you want to use Luke 22 in that context, I wouldn't argue with you. (In other words, some of the disciples had swords; some of us have guns.)

But, as many scholars recognize, Jesus was being ironic with His disciples, saying to them, "Look, the Scriptures teach that I will be numbered among the transgressors, the lawbreakers. So, we better make it look good. We need some swords!"

When they took him seriously and literally, saying, "Lord, we have two right here!" He replied by saying, "Enough with this!" As rendered in the HCSB: "'Lord,' they said, 'look, here are two swords.' 'Enough of that!' He told them" (Luke 22:38).

As Robert H. Stein explained in his Luke commentary, "The disciples misunderstood Jesus' words in 22:36 by interpreting them literally, and their lack of understanding is most evident at this point. ... Clearly two swords were not enough for any planned armed resistance. Jesus' words are best understood as breaking off further conversation as in Deuteronomy 3:26, i.e., 'Enough of this [foolish] conversation.'"

In sum, then: 1) For the umpteenth time, I'm not disputing the importance of the Second Amendment or our right to self-defense, nor do I have a problem with churches having good security; 2) I am disputing connecting the gospel with guns; 3) I am pointing out that Jesus' words in Luke 22:35-38 should not be taken literally as a call for all of us to go out and buy guns.

That being said, if you made it this far and read the article

in full, I'd love to hear your response.