

"Here Are Two Swords"

"And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye anything? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip; and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one"—Luke 22:35-36

THESE verses are sometimes quoted to justify the use of arms for defence of self, family and country. If this were all the Scriptures had to say on the subject, the inference could be accepted; but this claim—like so many false claims—arises from the use of isolated verses out of context and cannot be substantiated. It is out of harmony with the whole teaching of Scripture concerning the present position and duties of Christ's brethren. When Christ said—

"He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one."
—it would seem obvious from the disciples' response—
"Lord, behold, here are two swords."
—and Christ's reply to them— "It is enough."
—that he had another purpose in view, rather than the purchase of swords for their personal protection: otherwise 2 swords among 12 would hardly answer this purpose.

If we continue to read the chapter, we follow Christ and the apostles into the garden of Gethsemane, where shortly afterwards the mob led by Judas Iscariot approached them, and we read —

"But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss? When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword?

"And one of them smote the servant of the High Priest and cut off his right ear. And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear and healed him" (vs. 48-51).

Jesus would not permit the use of the sword, which the apostles were ready to use. Rather he healed the wound caused by the one blow. Matthew's account of this incident, wherein Christ rebuked Peter, the wielder of the sword, clearly demonstrates that 2 swords were sufficient *for the purpose Christ had in mind*, which was a literal lesson that they were not to put value on their lives to the extent of striving to preserve them by the use of the sword, or force, for he said —

"All that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matt. 26:52).

So well did the apostles learn this lesson in Gethsemane that although they afterwards suffered persecutions, torture, scourging, imprisonment, and violent death, one searches the Scriptures in vain to find where anyone of them ever again resorted to the sword; nor do we gain any impression that they wore a sword strapped to their side as they preached the Gospel. Paul says—

"For though we walk in the flesh, we do NOT war after the flesh; for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal" (2 Cor. 10:3-4).

And as Christ previously said (Luke 9:24-25)—

"For whosoever shall save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?"

Prior to Christ's reference to the purchase of swords, and the events in Gethsemane that we have been considering, a belligerent attitude manifested by James and John could have been what led Christ to give this lesson of non-violence. On an occasion when people of a certain Samaritan village would not accept Jesus, he had rebuked them. They had said (Luke 9:54-56)—

"Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elias did?

But Christ, rebuking them, said—

"Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

Here is revealed the purpose of Christ's first appearance, and also the duty of those that follow him in his absence.

Those believing in the right of war of defence make reference to the Old Testament, where Israel as a nation fought numerous battles; and to the many individual warriors of renown, such as David. The vital point overlooked here is that Israel fought against specific nations *at the direct command of God*, and the individual heroes or leaders arose in the course of these wars.

Israel was used as an instrument in God's purpose to punish and destroy wicked nations—nations that had degenerated so far from God that they worshiped idols of their own imagination and creation, and engaged in many vile abominations, to the extent of burning their children in the fire of sacrifice to these idols.

The lesson for us is that *God punishes evil*. He may tolerate it for a time, giving opportunity for repentance; but when the cup of iniquity is full, God destroys the wicked. There were occasions when Israel turned from God to serve idols, and God brought nations against them, delivering Israel to these nations for punishment, at times commanding them to submit and forbidding them to resist.

Throughout Israel's history they were directly under God's command, through priests and prophets who received His instructions. There were many instances when Israel faced overwhelming odds in battle and were victorious—not because of their prowess with the sword—but because God was, immediately with them, using them to fulfil His purpose. Much could be pointed out under this heading but suffice it for now to illustrate this aspect with reference to 2 scriptures. First, Judges 7:13-22, where God delivered Israel from the great host of the Midianites and Ammonites, sending the army of Israel home and using Gideon and a mere 300 men, so it would be beyond doubt that the victory was of God and not of man.

The other instance is recorded in Isaiah 37, in the days of Hezekiah, king of Judah, when Rabshakeh, captain of the army of the king of Assyria, besieged Jerusalem and demanded surrender, ridiculing the possibility of Israel's God giving deliverance, saying (vs. 10-13)—

"Thus, shall ye speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying, Let not thy God in Whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.

"Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be delivered?

"Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed—Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, the children of Eden?"

Hezekiah received this letter, and went up into the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord, and prayed, saying (vs. 16-20)—

"O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims: Thou art the God, even Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: Thou hast made heaven and earth. Incline Thine ear, O Lord, and hear all the words of Sennacherib which hath sent to reproach the living God. Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their countries and have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods but the work of men's hands, wood and stone, therefore they have destroyed them.

"Now therefore, O Lord our God, save us from his hand, that all kingdoms of the earth may know Thou art the Lord, even Thou only."

God's answer, through the prophet Isaiah (vs. 33-35)—

"Thus, saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it. . .

"For I will defend this city to save it FOR MINE OWN SAKE, and for My servant David's sake."

And so, it is recorded (v. 36)—

"Then the angel of the Lord went forth and smote in the camp of the Assyrians 185,000: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses."

That is the pattern in the past, when God used His Own nation to fight His Own wars of judgment and punishment, and so it will be again, at the proper time, when God so decrees.

As for the individual heroes in Israel, let David answer. When as a youth he went against the fearful sword and armour of the mighty Goliath, he went not in the confidence of a boy's sling and stones, or his own strength and prowess, but as he says (1 Sam. 17:45-47)—

"Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield. But I am come to thee in the Name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, Whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand: and I will smite thee and take thine head from thee. And I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth, THAT ALL THE EARTH MAY KNOW THAT THERE IS A GOD IN ISRAEL.

"And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear, for THE BATTLE IS THE LORD'S."

Returning to Christ's teaching for his brethren at the present time, we find that war, violence and retaliation are contrary to his express commands, some of which are—

"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matt. 19:19).

"Render not evil for evil" (1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Peter 3:9).

"Love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10).

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5).

"Be gentle unto all men" (2 Tim. 2:24).

"Resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matt. 5:39).

"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them that persecute you" (Matt. 5:44).

The fearful, fleshly mind of man says the foregoing commands of Christ are not practical, but that defence of one's self, family & country must be undertaken against an enemy bent on war. This, of course, is the answer of those who—trusting in and living by the sword—also die by the sword at last: the Rabshakehs, scoffing at the power of God to save.

What *causes* wars? Who can refute James' inspired assertion?

"From whence cometh wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence even of your lusts that war in your members?"

"Ye lust and have not; ye kill and desire to have and cannot obtain. Ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.

"Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:1-3).

What so-called "civilized" nation (or otherwise) can deny this? History shows the policy of men and nations has ever been: Might is right.

The play of words on the emotions of people by the talk of defending women and children is shown as propaganda hypocrisy, when in recent years we have witnessed 19- and 20-year-old sons of soldiers of the last World War conscripted to fight in Vietnam: and for what? So-called "Christianity" would be highly indignant and offended at any suggestion that they, like the ancient ignorant heathen, sacrifice their children to idols: but surely, they do this in their wars of worship of the lust for wealth and power.

Much is said and written about one's "country." The earth itself is void of emotions and sentiment, responding only to the laws instituted by God, such as sun and rain, and not to the blood of war. It is the absurdity of puny man claiming *ownership* of the earth—*God's* creation and sole possession—that promotes wars. We ask: Whose land is Australia: the aborigines'—or the whites'? The truth is that it belongs to neither: no man or nation owns any part of the earth, apart from the promise of God to Abraham—

"The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof" (Psa. 24:1).

Let God withdraw His mighty power, and vain, puny man would cease to exist at all, with all his presumptuous claims of possession. Soon all nations will be compelled to acknowledge the fact that the earth is *God's*, and His alone. The cup of the iniquity of the nations is once again nearly full. We recall the dire punishment of all mankind in the time of Noah, and, said Christ (Luke 17:26)—

"As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man" (Luke 17:26).

—even the coming of the King of kings, when that "time of trouble such as never was" shall precede the casting down of the nations, and the kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of our Lord (Rev. 11:15). Then shall come that glorious time when—

"They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa. 2:4).

But let us turn from the sword of the flesh, and man's wicked foolishness to briefly contemplate the sword Paul speaks of—

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

"Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

"Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with TRUTH, and having on the breastplate of RIGHTEOUSNESS; and your feet shod with the preparation of the GOSPEL OF PEACE, above all taking the shield of FAITH, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

"And take the helmet of SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the WORD OF GOD. Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Eph. 6:10-18).

These verses have been the subject of many an exhortation: we use them again that each may make a quick, personal appraisal of his armour. One point we note before we do this is: the warrior of old did not put his armour on to a naked body, but first put on a garment. We likewise did this when we passed by obedience thru the waters of baptism and were given a clean garment before we girded ourselves with this armour.

We look at this precious linen garment, and we ask: is it still white? Or has it taken on a pinkish hue because we have stained it with the red of worldly sin by resorting to the sword of the flesh—which can be done in many ways. Has the line of demarcation between the Truth and worldly ways become hazy to our eyes, that we no longer readily discern the sword of the Spirit from that of the flesh?

No doubt our breastplate of righteousness bears the scars of many conflicts, so in the hour of respite from worldly assault, given us each first day of the week, let us take the opportunity to check that our breastplate is firmly secured by those blue bands of eternal healing health of obedience granted us through the sacrifice of Christ. Looking back upon our walk of probation, has the Gospel

of peace faithfully encased our feet? Have they hastened us in bringing comfort and encouragement to each other, that we might mutually experience the gift offered by our Master—

"MY PEACE I GIVE UNTO YOU."

Or could it be we have been running to and fro causing discord, tending to create broken ranks to the detriment of a united body?

The shield of faith given to us is impregnable, for it is moulded from the indestructible Word of the Almighty, the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. No device of man can harm it or prosper against it. Protected by it, we are able to overcome all onslaughts against our faith. True, we can tire of the fight; of holding aloft the shield. We can turn from the King of kings our Commander, and—like those who crucified our Lord—claim the worldly Caesar as our king.

But as we weekly look to the memorial emblems, those words written with his blood rise before our eyes—

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

Surely on these occasions a consuming desire for his friendship causes us to clutch the shield of faith with renewed vigour!

The helmet of salvation: this requires a constant wearing. We must never be tempted by a heated brow to remove it, or to relax after an encounter with the adversary, for the helmet of salvation is the Truth. Through it we see with the eyes of the Truth. With our head covered by it, our thoughts and actions react to the Truth. Remove the helmet, and we see with the natural eye of flesh. Take the helmet from our head, and our thoughts and actions are motivated by the flesh, exposing us to death. My brethren and sisters, let us be found wearing this helmet when we stand before our Judge, that—the battle being ended—he may remove it and replace it with the wreath of victory, the stephan-crown of righteousness.

Finally, the sword of the Spirit: that by which we conduct our warfare; that by which we overcome the adversary—the flesh—in which dwelleth no good thing. This is a continuous fight. If we are encumbered by a sheath for our sword, cut it from our waist and cast it away, for in probation's fight there can never be a time for sheathing our sword. It must always be in our hand. The wise man said—

"Wisdom is better than weapons of war" (Eccl. 9:18).

Here then is wisdom: that we grasp firmly the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God—having implicit faith that God, Who delivered Israel so often from overwhelming odds by His power, can be our impregnable Shield and Defender—confident in the assurance that if God be for us, who can be against us. Let us therefore—

"Endure hardness, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ," *remembering . . .*

"No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier."

True, many of our beloved brethren and sisters have fought their last encounter on the battlefield of probation. We are comforted in the loss of their companionship as Christ is brought close to us in the words of Hymn 159—

*"When sorrowing o'er some stone I bend which covers all that was a friend,
And from his voice, his hand, his smile divides me for a little while;
My Saviour sees the tear I shed, for he did weep o'er Laz'rus dead."*

As we who still have to carry on the fight of probation close our ranks, our sorrow is submerged by the glorious knowledge that they shall rise, they shall come forth from the grave. Like Paul, they shall attain to the resurrection, when death is swallowed up in victory.

Our ranks have also been thinned by deserters, those who have trodden under foot the Son of man, turning again to the weak and beggarly elements of the world, having no depth of root.

Again, there are those who through weakness have been brought low yet struggle to rise again: may love and compassion bring us quickly to the side of such, encouraging and strengthening them to rise with renewed faith and wield again the sword of the Spirit. Remember, tomorrow the adversary may break through our defence: who is there that faileth not? Let us keep in mind the parable of the Good Samaritan: no doubt the Levite and the priest after seeing the stricken man used some quotation from the Law to justify their lack of love and compassion. This parable teaches love of neighbour, upholding the 2nd greatest commandment. Surely brethren and sisters warrant this same approach and love among themselves.

The sword of the Spirit was "bought" and placed in our hands by the obedience and blood of Christ, that we might live, and be clothed in the white garment of eternal life. Let us never, my brethren and sisters, sell or surrender this sword for the filthy garment of this world. If we do, the day of judgment will expose us to the humiliation of walking naked in our true character to the left hand of our Judge.

So, let us in true wisdom fight the good fight of faith, fashioning our lives and our characters by those attributes of the sword of the Spirit defined in 1 Thess. 5:7-23—

"They that sleep, sleep in the night, and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober; putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet the hope of salvation.

"For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us that—whether we wake or sleep—we should live together with him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as ye do. . .

"Warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man, but ever follow that which is good . . .

"Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

"Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things, hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly.

"And I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

There are two swords. They are ever before us. The one depends on the arm of corruptible flesh for its wielding—an arm that soon tires and falters, exposing the wielder of this sword to eternal death, and the end of all aspirations—

"He that liveth by (this) sword shall die by the sword."

The other, the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, which preserves and shields us to eternal life in the Kingdom of God. Having by the mercy and love of God had the sword of the Spirit placed in our hands, let us never relax our grip, but by daily absorption of this sharp and piercing Word grow in strength and confidence and holiness, meeting all adversaries, within and without, with David's triumphant war cry—

"I come to thee in the Name of the God of Israel!"

If we do this—

"No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper: and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn.

"This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of Me, saith the Lord" (Isa. 54:17).

And finally, those glorious inspired words of Paul's unshakable confidence and assurance of ultimate victory in this mighty warfare of the Spirit, if we hold fast to the end—

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

"As it is written, For Thy sake we are killed all the day long: we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

"Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:35-39). —R.H. (Taken from December 1975 Berean)
