

He Beat Them with a Whip!

John 2.13-16 *And the Jews passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem 14 And found in the temple those that sold OXEN AND SHEEP and doves and the changers of money sitting. 15 And when he had made A SCOURGE OF SMALL CORDS, he DROVE them all out of the temple, AND THE SHEEP, AND THE OXEN, and poured out the changers' money and overthrew the tables. 16 And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence. Make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. (compare with Matthew 21.12-13 Mark 11.15, Luke 19.45)*

The secular Christians are grateful for the seeming implication of the whip because they think they can use it to cancel out everything that Jesus said and did in respect to not hurting people. Here at last we have the real violent Jesus of Nazareth.

If John had clearly stated that Jesus beat the money changers with a whip, we would still have to reconcile that passage with everything else that Jesus said and did. Nowhere else in the four gospels does Jesus do anything violent, and his major teaching in the Sermon on the Mount explicitly prohibits violence. In Luke 9.54-56 James and John urge Jesus to *command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did. But he turned and rebuked them, and 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.*

He uses his powers to heal. Unlike Elias, he never uses his powers to hurt anyone. He uses his powers to raise the dead. He never uses them to kill the living. Once, he curses a fig tree and causes it to wither. He permits the evil spirits to go into the herd of swine, and they are driven to destruction. But where does he hit a man or cause him to be hit? So what excuse do we have for denying this consistent nonviolence with a mere inference from the story of the money changers? **But the inference is mistaken anyway.**

All four of the gospels give an account of Jesus driving the money-changers out of the temple. But only the gospel of John mentions that Jesus made *A SCOURGE OF SMALL CORDS*. John is also the only one that mentions the presence of large livestock in the temple--*OXEN AND SHEEP*. And John uses a different verb. The others say that Jesus *cast out* the money changers. John says he *DROVE* them out *and the sheep, and the oxen.*

A whip of cords is an implement of animal husbandry, not a weapon of war. It is a piece of braided rope, and it is something you use to move recalcitrant cattle, by swishing it at them or popping it at them, or, as a last resort, by whacking them with it. (I know this from helping my grandfather drive cattle when I was a boy.)

Well but he did knock over the tables etc. Wasn't this in effect a military attack? Wasn't it morally the equivalent of sending 500,000 soldiers to Vietnam or dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima? Can't you see Jesus doing this when you read about what he did in the temple?

Try It Yourself

Your pastor is indignant about the farmer's market which operates on Sunday in your town. So he recruits you to go there and close it down--it is up to the lay person to do this kind of thing of course. So you go there one Sunday and announce: *Everybody Out! You have 5 minutes to clear this space. Or Else!* Then you begin knocking over stalls.

There is one of you and several dozen of these farmers. Who have been coming there for months. Who have every right to be there so far as they know. Who have permits from the proper authorities. How fast will they leave? Not very fast. More likely, after ten minutes have gone by, you will be down on the ground with three fat farmer's wives sitting on you, while they wait for the police to arrive.

After your pastor bails you out and hears your story, he points out that you forgot the whip of cords, contra the bible. So the next Sunday you go back, equipped with a stout piece of braided manilla hemp. *This time you're in for it!* you announce. Same result, except this time they tie you up with the rope you brought while they wait for the police to arrive. What you learn from this experience is that one man with a piece of rope is not a formidable military force.

If Jesus of Nazareth had armed 20 of his followers with staves or swords and then led them into the temple to drive out the money-changers, you could justly describe it as a kind of military attack. But he did nothing of the sort.

What he did instead was to use soul force, the power of the spirit. How else could he have done it?--one man against dozens? So what appears to be the most physically forceful action of his life is yet another good example of the characteristic way he fought all his battles.

Obviously Jesus used some physical force in this encounter at least in respect to the tables that he overturned and the livestock that he drove out. Does this justify war? Common sense tells us that there is a distinction to be made between tackling a man out on a football field and shooting him with a revolver. There is an even more obvious distinction to be made between swatting your own recalcitrant child on the behind and shooting another man's child with a rifle.

A Christian father might gently swat his own recalcitrant child on the behind. Would he also join the soldiers at Mylai who herded the women and the children and the old folks into a ditch--for convenience in covering them with dirt afterwards--and who then shot them? And Mylai was a rarity for one reason only--pictures were taken which were afterwards published. Every war has 100 Mylais. That is what war is. That is why real Christians did not go to war in the time of the early church. Neither do they go to war now.

(from: JESUS THE ANTI KING c. 2004) Terry Sullivan

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