

Malchus

¹⁰Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) – John 18:10

⁴⁹When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?" ⁵⁰And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.

⁵¹But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him. – Luke 22:51

Jesus' final act of physical healing was one of the most unimaginable acts of kindness recorded in the Gospels. Yet, on another level, it is also one of the most frustrating.

On that fateful night, when a sinister and angry crowd of Jewish officials and temple guards came to Gethsemane to arrest Jesus, the impetuous Peter drew his sword and severed the ear of the servant of the high priest. It is doubtful that Peter intended to cut off the man's ear. It is more likely that he was trying to take off the man's head. Peter was, after all, a fisherman, not a swordsman. I picture a wild swing on Peter's part coupled with a dodge that was just shy of adequate on the part of Malchus. It was a lucky shot – or an unlucky one – depending on whether it was Peter or Malchus recounting the story.

All that seems clear is that Malchus was not numbered with the good guys that night. Nevertheless, Jesus commanded Peter to calm down and He miraculously returned Malchus' ear to its rightful place. Jesus now demonstrated one of the most provocative of all of His teachings when He loved an enemy in the presence of His very frightened and agitated band of Apostles.

But, I suggested that this is also a frustrating event, at least for those of us who like our stories to have their loose ends tied up neatly. Whatever became of Malchus? Could any man walk away from such an encounter with Jesus without being profoundly affected? I read one article in which the author argues from silence that it was shameful and cowardly that Malchus did not "switch sides." (How does he know Malchus did not switch sides?) One commentator suggested that John's mention of Malchus' name adds credibility to the account in that Malchus could be interviewed to confirm at least a version of John's story. Another suggests that the mention of a specific name indicates that John was an eyewitness to the events he described. The most personally satisfying speculation is that Malchus must have gratefully become a believer on Christ, for John would not have mentioned a personal name unless that name was recognizable amongst the audience to which he was writing, *ie.*, a fellow believer.

Still, when all is said and done, the Bible provides no answer to the question, "Whatever became of Malchus?" His story might have been one of repentance and transformation, but it might also have been one of cold, heartless ingratitude.

We are compelled to conclude that while in such instances literary closure might be nice, it is not essential. Jesus, the central character of the story, is Who He is. The grace of God appeared in this Jesus and that grace was manifested and offered to the whole world. Jesus once cleansed ten lepers. After presenting themselves to a priest to have their cleansings confirmed so that they might resume their places in society, only one remembered to return to Jesus so as to thank Him. In this life, we will never know if Malchus followed the lead of those nine lepers or the lead of the one. All we can really tend to is how we will respond to the grace of God in Jesus. God grant us that He will find us thankful and willing to share our story with others.

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