

# “You’ll Be All Right Now”

Malchus <sup>1</sup>

What I am about to tell you is a very strange story. It is a story that raises very nearly as many questions as it answers. This is a story about an incident in Jesus’ life that the Gospel writers considered so important that all four of them recorded it. At the same time, the whole thing happens so quickly and is recorded so cryptically that in some ways, it strains credulity.

While the story feels like “a stretch” in some ways, the story satisfies two of the most important criteria of authenticity, which are the criteria of “multiple attestation” and “embarrassment.” This means, first of all, that we have more than one record of the event, from different reporters, and second, that the event is not one that the early Church would have been eager to record, since it portrays one of its founding leaders in rather a bad light. It’s hard to imagine the early Church making this up.

The story you’re about to hear has to do with the only time in the New Testament that anyone associated with Jesus committed an act of physical violence against another person, and this particular act was an attempted murder. Furthermore, to add a bit of drama to what I’m about to tell you, these things happened one thousand nine hundred and eighty-three years ago . . . tonight.<sup>2</sup>

Some of you may have realized that the event to which I make reference is Peter’s attempted murder of Malchus, a slave or servant of the High Priest, at the time of Jesus’ arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane on the first Maundy Thursday. The event is recorded in all four Gospels,<sup>3</sup> though only John gives us Malchus’ name and tells us that Peter was the attacker (John 18:10). And only Luke—the physician—tells us that Jesus healed Malchus’ ear (Luke 22:50-51).

We don’t know why, in the tension of the moment, Peter chose Malchus to attack. The arresting soldiers represented the High Priest, and some think that Malchus was well known as the Chief Assistant of the High Priest. That would explain Peter’s attack, but the idea is no more than conjecture.

Apparently Peter was attempting to relieve Malchus of his head, but Malchus ducked, and so was only struck on the side of the head. Even so, such a powerful blow with a battle sword should have done a great deal more damage; so it may be that Peter was wielding something more on the order of a dagger.

Perhaps the most astounding part of the story is what didn’t happen. The Gospel writers emphasize the point that the arresting officers were heavily armed, and it is therefore enormously surprising that these soldiers—apparently Temple guards sent from the High Priest—made no response to Peter’s attack. Our daily news reminds us frequently that it is not characteristic of armies and police forces to absorb deadly attacks without retaliation.

Indeed, at least according to the records we have, the arresting soldiers made no response to Peter at all. He was not arrested, was not attacked, was not restrained, and wasn’t even

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<sup>1</sup> A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on March 24, 2016, Maundy Thursday.

<sup>2</sup> The actual date was April 2, A.D. 33, the night before Passover that year. Neither the calendar date nor the relation to Passover are the same tonight, but we are at the same point in Holy Week as was the original event.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 26:47-27:10; Mark 14:43-72; Luke 22:47-71; John 18:1-27

disarmed. The whole sequence strains credulity, and there is no obvious reason why the incident was so significant that all four Evangelists recorded it.

One theory of why the soldiers made no response is that the High Priest may have been trying to capture and imprison Jesus quietly, without attracting the attention of the Roman soldiers whose job it was to maintain order in the city during Passover. On this theory, the High Priest's goal would have been to quietly cause Jesus to disappear so that He couldn't cause any more trouble during Passover, and then to arrange to have Him killed after the festival was over and the crowds had gone home.

It's intriguing that we know absolutely nothing at all about Malchus beyond this one vignette. He is never mentioned again in Scripture or in any other records that we possess, and yet the Church has taken pains to record and perpetuate his name and this story for nearly twenty centuries. Perhaps these words of background will help you sense how electric has been the discovery of the journal entries you are about to hear . . .<sup>4</sup>

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"I'm really not sure what to do with the information I'm recording in this journal. These are not things that can be broadly known—indeed, this information is really quite secret—and yet I feel that I will burst if I don't tell someone, so for now, I'm recording this in my private notes.

"As you know if you've been reading this journal, my name is Malchus, which means 'king.' It's a common name among my people, the Idumeans. Through a series of *unlucky* events some years ago, I became a slave of the High Priest of the Jews, in their capital city, Jerusalem. And through a series of *lucky* events, my administrative skills allowed me to become the Chief Steward of the High Priest's household.

"While I certainly take no pleasure in being a slave, I have rather enjoyed my position as Chief Steward to the most powerful Jew in Israel. As 'the ears of the High Priest' on the streets of the capital city, I generally enjoy a great deal more respect than that to which slaves are accustomed.

"While my work does have its benefits, the High Priest, whose name is Caiaphas, is not really a very pleasant fellow. The city is filled with political intrigue, and Caiaphas is a conniving man with more than a few enemies. A great deal of my time is spent walking around the city listening to conversations and trying to discover any developments that might be potentially damaging to Caiaphas or to his governance of the city.

"The truth of the matter is that Caiaphas' position is not particularly enviable, though it is fairly luxurious. Israel is an occupied country, and the occupying army, the Army of Rome, does not take kindly to the sedition and insurrection that have been frequent among the Jews. If Caiaphas were to be unsuccessful in keeping order in the city, the Romans would quickly impose order with a cruel ruthlessness that is feared with good reason throughout the world.

"Caiaphas has been dispatching me lately to keep tabs on a man named Jesus, an itinerant prophet from Galilee, who is in town for Passover. This Jesus is immensely popular with the people, but he is both hated and feared by Caiaphas and the other leaders of the Jews.

"Lately, Jesus has been teaching every day in the courts of the Temple, and huge crowds have been coming to hear him. As I've followed Jesus around and taken notes on what he's been

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<sup>4</sup> The story that follows has been modified from Ralph F. Wilson,  
<http://www.joyfulheart.com/easter/malchus.htm>

saying, I've been rather astounded at some of his claims. I've heard him say such things as *'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'*

"That seems pretty outlandish and arrogant, but I've also heard him say such things as *'Come to me, all you who are weak and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.'*

"When I heard Jesus say, *'You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them,'* I thought to myself that it is not only the rulers of the Gentiles who behave so. And then Jesus said, *'It is not to be so with you who follow me. Whoever wants to become great among you must be your slave, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'*

"I didn't know what to make of all that, but it didn't sound dangerous. And it sounded a whole lot more attractive than the attitude of the political 'movers and shakers' with whom I have to spend my days.

"As I followed Jesus around the city, I began to see who his primary followers were. I was especially interested in one of them, whose body language signaled a high degree of ambivalence about Jesus. I learned that this man's name was Judas, that he was one of those whom Jesus called 'The Twelve,' and I imagined that he might be very useful to my master.

"Last week, I arranged for Judas to have a discreet audience with Caiaphas, and Judas agreed to participate in a clandestine operation Caiaphas was putting together. Caiaphas was determined to achieve two goals over the next few days: he wanted to quietly capture Jesus and get him out of the Temple during Passover; and then, when the festival crowds were gone, Caiaphas intended to have him killed.

"Judas was useful to Caiaphas because he knew where Jesus would be after dark each night. My job would be to have Judas lead me with a contingent of the Temple Guard to Jesus and his followers late at night, when all the crowds would be gone. We'd hope to arrest Jesus quietly, without attracting the attention of the Romans, and then we'd lock him up until his death could be arranged after the festival.

"On the night when we launched our operation, Judas was indeed able to lead us to Jesus. As the High Priest's henchman-du-jour, I was in front of the guards as Judas identified Jesus for me. Suddenly, one of Jesus' rag-tag followers pulled out a dagger and lunged at me. I was able to duck and to deflect the blow, but the thrust did succeed in cutting off my right ear.

"I fell to my knees, bleeding horribly and in agonizing pain. I closed my eyes as I screamed out in pain . . . and then, as quickly as it had come, the pain stopped. When I opened my eyes, Jesus was kneeling in front of me, with his hand on my ear. He looked deep into my eyes and gently said, *'You'll be all right, now.'*

"As my soldiers captured and bound Jesus, I felt the side of my head. My ear had been completely restored, and only my blood-soaked cloak showed that anything had happened at all.

"Jesus knew whose slave I was, and he surely knew what we were up to. So why did he heal me? As I followed the soldiers back to Caiaphas' palace, I kept hearing Jesus' gentle words, *'You'll be all right now. You'll be all right now.'* And I wondered.

"I knew what was going to happen next. Caiaphas would convene a quorum of the Rulers of the Jews for a kangaroo court that would sentence Jesus to death. That outcome was certain. The fly in the ointment was that Rome reserved the death penalty for itself, and so Caiaphas

would have to find a way to get Pontius Pilate, the Roman Procurator who governed Judea, to go along with that verdict.

“I wasn’t expecting Caiaphas to be as successful as he turned out to be in this project, or that he would complete his task so quickly. By the time I had changed clothes and taken a short nap, the whole thing was all but over. I followed the crowds outside the city to Golgotha, Jerusalem’s infamous hill of execution, where I was amazed to see Jesus already hanging in agony on a Roman cross. Pilate had posted a sign above Jesus’ head that said, ‘Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.’

“As I stood there taking all this in, Caiaphas strutted up, puffing, blustering, and taunting Jesus. Caiaphas was vengeful, arrogant, filled with hatred. I didn’t sense any of those things from Jesus, and I remembered something else I had heard Jesus say while he taught in the Temple—*‘The Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost.’*

“What have I *done?*’ I asked myself. This man did not deserve to die!

“Suddenly, the sky grew unnaturally dark, and a fierce wind began to blow. I fell to my knees, in an agony of sorrow and repentance rather than in the agony of blood and pain that had taken me to my knees the night before. I discovered with shock and horror that I was kneeling in Jesus’ blood, in the very place where they had nailed him to the cross. And I heard him cry out, *‘Father, forgive them. They don’t have any idea what they’re doing.’*

“I stayed on the hill until Jesus died, at about three o’clock. Just before he died, Jesus shouted out, *‘It is finished!’* And then he was gone.

“As I walked slowly down the hill back to the city, I wondered what was finished. I asked God to forgive me for my part in this horrible deed. And I could still hear Jesus’ words ringing in my ears and in my heart from the night before: *‘You’ll be all right, now.’*”