

The Old Hickory

Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN SUFFERS VIOLENCE

What did Jesus mean when he said, “the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force,” in Matt. 11:12? This inquiring Bible student seeks to better understand the nature of God’s kingdom. What a good question!

The Scriptures provide the answer for us, as we consider other passages that are related to this one. Luke’s parallel passage says regarding “the kingdom of God,” that “everyone is forcing his way into it.” (Luke 16:16). Violence may allow some people to force their way into an earthly, political kingdom, but the Lord’s kingdom is different. Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.” (John 18:36). Men of violence always stood ready to usher in

change (in kingdoms) by force, and those expecting the promised kingdom of God, with one to come and sit upon David's throne (Isa. 9:7) were no different because they failed to understand the true nature of the kingdom.

The kingdom can be illustrated, metaphorically, as a castle, or walled-city that violent men are trying to force themselves into to take possession of it. Jesus said that this was going on "from the days of John the Baptist until now." (Matt. 11:12). Mark stated that, "John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem;" (Mark 1:4-5). At a time when high expectations for the coming of God's kingdom were growing, people heard the voice of John preaching in the wilderness that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:1-2). Weary of Roman taxes and oppression, all Judea was going out to hear him and usher in the new kingdom. Their kingdom expectations were dashed when John emphatically declared, "I am not the Christ." (John 1:20). When they heard Jesus preaching the kingdom is at hand (Matt. 4:17), and they "saw the sign which He had performed," they were convinced that Jesus was the predicted "Prophet who is to come into the world" (John 6:14), the multitude was preparing to "force" the coming of the new kingdom. John wrote, "So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone." (John 6:15). The Lord's action showed that He gave no approval to what was about to happen. Their motives were wrong (loaves and fishes). This effort to force themselves into the misconceived kingdom made it necessary for the Lord on occasion to avoid crowds and command healing recipients to "tell no one." The perceived kingdom with its desired benefits did not match the

Lord's purpose and design. Neither did the means and terms of entrance. The violent sought to force it, but that is not what took place.

It seem today that some can "force" the kingdom (externally speaking) under the influence of "Christian" rock & roll bands, huge theater and stage productions designed to entertain, and big campaigns and rallies designed for the emotional impact of high-pressure salesmanship. This is the modern equivalent to the Jewish misconception prevalent when Jesus came, which was based upon a materialistic interpretation of Old Testament prophecy and a desire for political independence. [They foolishly followed false prophets who embraced kingdom misconceptions (Acts 5:35-39; Matt. 24:23-24).] Today's violent men roar and blast their amplified voices to take the world for Christ, but He "withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone." The New-Testament Christ has slipped away from them in disapproval. The Lord is quietly at work in His kingdom, in humble, obedient hearts that prize love for truth (2 Thess. 2:10-14; cf. 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:15, 18, 25-26; 4:4; Titus 1:14).

Jesus said, "In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, '*You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; You will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; For the heart of this people has become dull, With their ears they scarcely hear, And they have closed their eyes, Otherwise they would see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, And understand with their heart and return, And I would heal them.*'" (Matt. 13:14-15). Potential kingdom subjects must conform their understanding to that of the Lord (Mark 12:34). Essential to participation in Christ's kingdom is a "conversion," a change in the heart (John 3:3, 5). His kingdom is spiritual, "Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, "The

kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here *it is!*' or, 'There *it is!*' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst." (Luke 17:20-21).

Men could never literally force the coming of Christ's kingdom. Neither could they literally force entrance into it. The kingdom of God came in the lifetime of those to whom Jesus spoke in Mark 9:1, just as the Lord said. It came with power, just as He said (cf. Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; Acts 2). Friend, are you in the Lord's kingdom? Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (John 6:29, 68-69)? He can deliver you from the power of darkness and translate you into the kingdom (Col. 1:13). May we help you?

- GFS

Give Me The Truth!

If you are my friend, if you are concerned with my soul, give me the truth. Do not flatter me. Do not praise my virtues while remaining silent about my vices. Do not fear the truth will offend me. Do not treasure our friendship, our friendly relations, above truth.

Do not think by ignoring my sins, you can help me. Do not think that being blind to my sins will prove yourself charitable. However, I may react to it, whatever may be my attitude toward you after you have done it, give me the truth. For the truth, and only the truth, can make me free from the shackles of sin, strengthen me in the pathway of righteousness, and lead me to heaven's joy.

If I am wavering, weak, lukewarm, indifferent, neglectful; if I have been overtaken in a trespass: if I have been drawn into the pleasure of the

world, if I have left my first love: if I have been led astray by error; or if I have done none of these, but simply need to grow in knowledge and be edified, give me the truth.

“THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO YOU”

(Anonymous)

**There's a Gospel according to Matthew:
To Mark and to Luke and John too,
There's another that many are reading— The Gospel according to you.
All teachings we find in the Bible
Are good facts we believe to be true,
You must live them to make them the Gospel— The Gospel according to you.
Every day you are writing your Gospel;
In this life you may never know who
May be helped or hindered by reading
The Gospel according to you.
There is power in the preacher's preaching,
So you say, I believe this is true;
But the thing that may tell most on others
Is the Gospel according to you.
God help you to Christ ever be faithful,
And to live all His teachings so true.
So that all may be seeing His Spirit
In the Gospel according to you.**

SUNDAY'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *“The Church: Some Misconceptions Cleared Up!”* (text: Eph. 3:8-11); Sunday evening: *Jesus Christ: A Closer Look – Delivered To Death!* (Mark 15:16-41).