

GRACE GAZETTE

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Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees. And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Hebrews 12:12-13

VIOLENCE IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. Matthew 11:12

Some have described our society as increasingly violent. It is a true thing that we are confronted with acts of violence nearly every day, whether it is some domestic squabble which has gotten out of hand, murderous terrorists going about maiming and destroying themselves and others, or our own government committing acts of mayhem and destruction in the name of freedom. But one only has to turn to the Old Testament scriptures to discover that this type of violence has been occurring from the very beginning of man's existence. The saga of man's journey through time had only just begun when Cain slew his brother in a fit of religious jealousy. We see both the armies of the heathen and those of Israel wreaking carnage upon all who stood in their path. No distinction was made between man, woman, child or beast as they slaughtered all who moved. Even the prophet Samuel (in a demonstration of obedience to the LORD) hewed, the defenseless king Agag, to pieces. So violence of this type is nothing new, it is just the manifestation of sin's awful curse upon men.

But violence is not always to be associated with the shedding of blood and acts of destruction, neither is it always to be looked upon negatively. Some of the definitions used by Webster for violence are "1 a : exertion of physical force so as to injure or abuse (as in effecting illegal entry into a house) 3 b : vehement feeling or expression : FERVOR; ". The definition given for violent is "1 : marked by extreme force or sudden intense activity 2 a : notably furious or vehement b : EXTREME, INTENSE 3 : caused by force : not natural 4 a : emotionally agitated to the point of loss of self-control ". The violence described by the LORD in this scripture from Matthew is a good thing and actually describes the manner in which HIS children strive to enter the kingdom of heaven.

We are taught in the scripture that the salvation of GOD's people is that which is marked out before their birth, paid for and accomplished by the righteousness and shed blood of the SAVIOR, and then brought to pass in time by the effectual call of the HOLY SPIRIT. They are elected, redeemed, called, and ultimately resurrected from the grave to dwell in immortal glory. This is all accomplished without their aid or consent. (see Eph. 1:4; Heb.9:12; Rom.8:30)

Yet the LORD JESUS is speaking about GOD's children entering into the kingdom of heaven in an active sense which involves their desire and will. Men cannot determine their election by climbing a ladder to heaven and perusing the pages of the LAMB's book of life (see Rev.13:8) but they can experience its reality by a work wrought in them by the HOLY SPIRIT. (see II Pet.1:10,11; Phil.2:13) Repentance and faith are both gifts from GOD that are manifested actively and can be seen and felt in HIS children in a real way. A man does not have to wait until death to experience the blessings of eternal life nor does he have to enter heaven to taste of heavenly things. (see Eph.1:3-14;2:5-6; John 4:14) We are not the children of darkness.

In the modern concept of "salvation", men are seen as supplying a part which GOD himself is either unable or unwilling to supply. Salvation is presented as something men can (more or less) acquire for themselves by giving their assent and agreement and "letting" GOD come into their hearts. This is a concept which is totally foreign to the scripture. Yet it has been and is being proclaimed far and wide as the "gospel". The "great evangelistic ministries" of the last century have reduced entering the kingdom of heaven into a simple formula which if any man agrees to he is assured of "salvation". The description which the LORD gives of "taking (i.e.; entering) the kingdom by force" is one which is in contrast to a simple agreement to some terms.

In the sermon on the mount the LORD said, *"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."* (Matt 5:6) When a man experiences the quickening and conviction of the HOLY GHOST he becomes acquainted with his own wickedness and inability to help himself. He becomes as the publican who cried out, *"God be merciful to me a sinner."* (Luke 18:13) When he hears the gospel preached, he is as blind Bartimaeus in Mark 10:47-48 *"And when he heard that it was JESUS of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, JESUS, thou SON of David, have mercy on me. And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, Thou SON of David, have mercy on me."* Just as nothing could deter the blind beggar from calling out until he was heard, an awakened sinner will cry out unto the LORD for mercy, knowing his need to be so great and the capability of the SAVIOR so complete that he "must" (see Acts 4:12) seek HIM, he can choose no other course of action. When Peter preached CHRIST on the day of Pentecost, men were smitten in their hearts and said, *"Men and brethren, what shall we do?"* (Acts 2:37) When the Philippian jailer was convicted as he faced certain death, he fell down at Paul and Silas' feet and said "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30) These people "violently" sought the kingdom of heaven. They weren't looking for a card to sign, an aisle to walk down, or a canned prayer to pray. They needed a SAVIOR and nothing would deter them from that quest and nothing else could comfort them. Nobody needed to plead with them to do anything; they were intently and fervently seeking a remedy for the need of their very souls. We "have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." (Heb 6:18)

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