

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

The religion of the Jews was one which was passed down from one generation to the next. This was accomplished by the teaching of Moses law, the reading of the scriptures, and oral accounts of JEHOVAH's dealings with the descendants of Abraham. If a man was born a Jew he was expected to carry out those same traditions which were mandated by that law, and was, by his birth and continuation in those traditions, considered to be a part of that chosen nation and an inheritor of the "covenant" as a result.

When the LORD JESUS came, HE turned that religion on its ear and laid an axe to the root of any notion that any man could expect to be included in the kingdom of Heaven, (which HE, as the MESSIAH came to establish) by such rote obedience or natural birth. Needless to say HE was not very well received by the teachers and leaders of that religion, since the same axe that cut that root, struck them as well and removed any source of power which they might find to exert "in the name of GOD" as they perpetuated that religious tradition.

Their traditions had become more important to them than knowledge of the true and living GOD and they considered that the fear of GOD could be taught by the precept of men. The mainstream religion of our day is not much different than that as men are taught that they can pass on true "Christianity" by the same methods, even causing themselves to be "saved" by an act of their own free will. Many who call themselves "Christians" believe that they can even hold GOD himself hostage, and either permit HIM to save them or prevent HIM from doing so by an act of this freewill.

When these sacrosanct ideas are challenged, men will often rise up in anger against any who would dare to tell them that men are born into GOD's kingdom, "*not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*" (John 1:13) Then on the other hand such declarations often leave men dumbfounded. This was exactly the scenario that was demonstrated when the LORD met with Nicodemus. Nicodemus never even got to ask the LORD a question. There was no need for a question to be asked because the LORD brought Nicodemus to him under cover of night to deliver a startling message to him which he could not have imagined. "*Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*" (John 3:3)

John the Immerser (Baptist), being the greatest and last of the old testament prophets, (see Mat. 11:11) was privy to seeing the MESSIAH in the flesh, saying of HIM, "*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*" (John 1:29) He also recognized that the ministry of CHRIST was unlike any before "*John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.*" (Luke 3:16)

This is that "*baptism*" which the LORD JESUS spoke of when HE mentioned that the "*kingdom of heaven suffereth violence.*" The Greek word which is translated as "*violence*" here is "*biazo*"

which means to “be pressed or forced into”. HE is saying that this Kingdom of which HE is the KING is one of power and not words, it is one of truth and not religion, it is not externally observed but rather internally manifested. *“And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation.” (Luke 17:20) “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1Cor 2:14)*

This kingdom is not inherited by flesh and blood, nor are its subjects those who have merely made a choice to be there akin to choosing which color of socks to wear. Rather the subjects of this kingdom are those who have been subjected, both, to a force which they could neither resist nor overcome and become empowered with a force that cannot be denied the thing which they seek. *“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me”. (John 6:37) “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.” (Psa 110:3)* They are those who have been born again by the power (dunamis or dynamite) of the HOLY GHOST.

Having been the subjects of “violence” they now press into that kingdom with the same “violence” even as Jacob of old wrestled with “a MAN” and would not let go. We see this same “violence” demonstrated in the blind beggar Bartimaeus, as he cried out , *“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.” (Mar 10:47-48)* He would not be silent though told by the crowd to hush. He cried out the louder with violence.

It is the same “violence” that gripped the publican and caused him to say *“GOD be merciful to me a sinner.”* The same which caused the Philippian jailer to cry out *“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Act 16:30)* and inhabited those men who were pricked in the heart and excitedly inquired of the apostles on the day of Pentecost, *“Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Act 2:37)* It is the same violence that was manifested by the Ethiopian, as he said, *“See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? -----I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” (Act 8:36-37)*

These were not men simply seeking out some religious dogma or desiring to fulfill some ritual but were as Bunyan describes Christian (in Pilgrim’s Progress) as he ran from his house in the City of Destruction, crying “Life, life, eternal life.” They would not be denied the thing which they sought, they testified with Job of old, *“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” (Job 13:15)* and were of the same SPIRIT as the woman who sought deliverance for her daughter. *“And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.” (Mat 15:22-28)* This is the resolve of the man awakened to flee the wrath to come:

Prostrate I’ll lie before His throne, And there my guilt confess,
I’ll tell Him, I’m a wretch undone, Without His sovereign grace.
Perhaps He will admit my plea, Perhaps will hear my prayer;
But, if I perish, I will pray, And perish only there.
I can but perish if I go; I am resolved to try;
But if I stay away, I know I must forever die.
But, if I die with mercy sought, When I the King have tried,
This were to die (delightful thought!) As sinner never died.

By E.Jones, Rippon’s Selection
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