

The Kingdom Suffers Violence

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The weekly Sabbath, and the Feast of Tabernacles, which we recently observed with others of faith at time of this writing, both are intended to point us toward the time when God's Kingdom will be established on the earth. Each Sabbath, and each Feast of Tabernacles, if kept properly, gives us a small foretaste of the Kingdom, to be reminded and convicted of its reality.

They remind us that the promised Kingdom of God is not just a pie-in-the-sky, Utopian dream, but an actual change in the government of the earth that will occur. It's called the Kingdom of God because it will be a Kingdom, a literal government, established by the divine intervention of God Almighty himself in the world's affairs and it will be ruled directly by God in the person of Jesus Christ (Daniel 7:14; Revelation 11:15).

Part of the reality of that promised Kingdom, however, is the fact that human beings have an opportunity to be participants in it, to have a part in the Kingdom of God, not as mere flesh and blood human beings, but as Sons of God changed into the likeness of Jesus Christ, helping him to administer truth, equity and justice on the earth (Daniel 7:27; Philippians 3:20-21; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 3:2; Revelation 20:6).

But what will it take for that opportunity to become a personal reality for each of us? From a personal standpoint, what will it take for you to be in God's Kingdom?

Jesus addressed this question in a statement which I want to focus on in this article. He pointed out a vital key to being in God's Kingdom that we must implement in our lives if we expect to turn opportunity into reality. A partial answer to the question, "What will it take for you to be in the Kingdom?," is aggressive, determined, effort. That's the point of this article.

Notice Matthew 11:12: "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force." What did Jesus mean by this statement? To many it's an enigmatic statement but it's not really that difficult to understand.

Jesus is here drawing an analogy between the taking of a Kingdom and entering into the Kingdom of God. Both require the same kind of single minded commitment, and aggressive action.

If we want to be in God's kingdom we've got to pursue it aggressively, passionately. It's got to become the number one goal in our lives, and it must be a goal that we seek to accomplish with focus, energy and resolve, just as you would if you were seeking to conquer an earthly kingdom of this world.

How successful would an army be if it were composed of soldiers who were

apathetic, disinterested, distracted -- more interested in their own comfort and safety than accomplishing the goal? Would such an army be successful?

Compare its chances with an army of soldiers who are purposeful, committed, determined, energetic and aggressive.

The Greek word translated "violent" in Matthew 11:12, βίαστης (*biastés*), can also be translated energetic, or aggressive. A *Conservative Version* translation translates the same verse as follows: "And from the days of John the immerser until now the kingdom of the heavens is treated aggressively, and aggressors seize it."

In a companion Scripture Jesus stated, "The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it" (Luke 16:16). Again Jesus implies that to enter the Kingdom requires aggressive, energetic action. This is in the context of choosing which master you will serve, God, or mammon.

John came announcing what the Law and prophets had long anticipated, a new age, the age of the Kingdom of God. Many were stirred and excited by his message. Others treated it with derision and still others with indifference (Matthew 11:18; 21:25-26, 32; Luke 3:2-15).

The same was true when Jesus Christ came bearing the same message. If you believe the message, if you believe in the reality of the future Kingdom of God, that's good. But if you actually want to be a part of it, that belief must stir you to action. You can't passively sit on the sidelines and expect to be a participant in God's government.

Between us and the Kingdom are many obstacles, not least of which is our own flesh, our lusts, the attractions and distractions of the world we live in, the opposition of Satan and his minions. All these require aggressive, determined action on our part to overcome. And Jesus warns that the gift of eternal life, of being in his kingdom, sharing in his power and glory, requires us to overcome (Revelation 2:7,10-11, 26-27; 3:5-6, 21).

God grants each one of us the opportunity to fulfill the destiny for which God created us, the destiny of being in his Kingdom, his family, for all eternity. Indifference, passivity, indolence, lethargy are mortal enemies which can prevent any of us from realizing the fulfillment of the opportunity that lies before us. Jesus sternly warns against such a "Laodicean" spirit (Revelation 3:14-19).

Paul admonished Timothy (1 Timothy 6:11-12), "But you, O man of God, flee these things; [flee means run away from, it implies vigorous action to remove yourself from those things that would distract you from your goal of the Kingdom] and pursue [again implying aggressive action] righteousness, [pursue] godliness,

[pursue] faith, [pursue] love, [pursue] patience, [pursue] meekness. Fight the good fight of faith [notice how genuine faith implies action; true godly faith places you in a position where you must fight; you must fight against all those things which would impede your progress toward becoming like Jesus Christ; and you must fight for those qualities of character which will help you become like Jesus Christ], lay hold on [or seize, as it could be translated] eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”

You may have read in a commentary or heard a preacher make a statement like, “There's the religion of 'do' and the religion of 'done.' “ The implication being that Jesus has done everything for us, there's nothing we need to do pertaining to salvation. That's a subtle lie.

God does for us that which we could not possibly do for ourselves. And with his help we can do what he requires of us (Philippians 4:13). But he does require us to do our part (Hebrews 10:36).

If you want eternal life, if you want to be in God's Kingdom, you must overcome the obstacles that stand in your way, whatever they may be. That means you've got to fight, you must pursue your goal with zeal, energy, dedication and determined, dogged effort. So do it.

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