

# The Kingdom is Grasped By Faith

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INI - SDG

**Matthew 11:12 <sup>12</sup> "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.**

1903 is considered the first successful flight of a powered airplane by the Wright brothers. Wilbur Wright died nine years later in 1912. Orville Wright lived another 45 years. He died in 1948.

What was Orville doing all those years? Apparently, he spent most of those years fighting court case after court case trying to keep control of his patents. The wright brothers gave the world this great gift. The result was that powerful men tried to take control of it.

Invent something amazing and what happens? Everybody wants a piece of it. Some people sell t-shirts. Some try to improve and make something better. Some try to take control of it. Some attempt to discredit the inventor.

The wright flyer was not even added to the Smithsonian Museum until 1948. The curator had been attempting to invent an airplane himself. He wouldn't admit that the Wright brothers had beaten him to it.

This is what Jesus is talking about in our text.

John came preaching repentance and baptism in the wilderness. With his preaching the door to the kingdom of heaven was thrown wide open. All of Judea and Galilee was stirred up to come and hear this news. And of course, there were many who tried to take control of it for themselves.

The NKJ here has the violent take it by force, but it would be better to translate it "the violent try to take it by force." Some opposed it. Some tried to control it. Some sought to profit from it.

Jesus had to drive the moneychangers out of the gates of the temple because they were there to profit from God's kingdom.

Jesus also says to the Pharisees in Matthew 23

**13 "you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in"**

**15 "you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves."**

Not much has changed in 2,000 years. We heard in our reading from Revelation how the angel is proclaiming the everlasting gospel. Yet there are still violent men who think that by their strength and cunning they can control or destroy or profit from God's kingdom. They sit there at the doors to the kingdom like those money changers. They don't allow people to enter the kingdom but instead sell them every kind of empty promise and fake knock off of God's word. They are the smooth talkers that Paul

speaks of in Romans 16:18. It happened at the time of Jesus. It happened at the time of Martin Luther. It is happening now.

Yet as we heard earlier this month, they are not able to prevail against God's anointed. They are not able to enter into the kingdom by force of mind, or strength of body.

John came preaching repentance and baptism for the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. This alone is the way into God's kingdom. A repentant heart and faith in Jesus Christ for forgiveness of your sins. This alone is the way to heaven. Violent men will try but they cannot enter or shut the gates that God has opened.

This is the first pillar of the reformation. The benefits of Christ's death become ours through faith. By faith alone we can enter the kingdom. Violent men try to take it by force but are unable to enter.

**Matthew 11:13-15** <sup>13</sup> "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. <sup>14</sup> "And if you are willing to receive *it*, he is Elijah who is to come. <sup>15</sup> "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

This verse sounds odd to us because it may come across as though Jesus is making the truth conditional. We have to understand that Jesus is putting a condition not on the truth but on the offering of that truth. Jesus is saying if you are willing to hear it, I will give you this truth.

John is the fulfillment of the prophecy from Micah that Elijah would come again. The question is whether you are willing to receive it. It is a truth which many will not accept. It is a truth which is accepted only by faith.

Herod was one of those violent men who attempted to take control of the kingdom. John was seemingly under his control in prison. How could God allow his greatest prophet not only to go to prison but to die at the hands of Herod? That truth is so difficult to grasp that John himself doubts.

Yet by faith we perceive that even though John died at the hands of Herod, Herod did not win. By faith we perceive that this is God's kingdom. By faith we see God's kingdom even in suffering.

Faith alone can see God's fulfillment in the death of John the Baptist. Faith alone can see the kingdom. Faith alone can enter the kingdom. Many and powerful are the violent men whom Jesus speaks about but only those who walk by faith can enter the kingdom.

**Matthew 11:25** I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the wise and prudent* and have revealed them to babes.

**Matthew 11:16-19** <sup>16</sup> "But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, <sup>17</sup> "and saying: 'We played the flute for you, And you did not dance; We mourned to you, And you did not lament.' <sup>18</sup> "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' <sup>19</sup> "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'

Jesus calls them children because this is an extremely childish attitude, to sit and demand that others conform to my expectations. If I play the flute you must dance. If I'm sad you must cry. You must conform to my expectations.

Neither John nor Jesus lived up to the Pharisees expectations. John was too austere, and Jesus was too lenient. This is an attitude many have towards Jesus and God and his kingdom.

This is an attitude that leads to all kinds of problems in marriages. We just assume our spouse will act in this way or in that way. We don't even discuss it with them, but we sure get angry and upset when they don't act the way we expect them to.

This is pernicious when we do it to one another, but it is especially dangerous when we do it to God. We assume that God must live up to my expectations.

They were not expecting someone who came with such Grace that he would condescend even to tax-collectors and sinners. When they saw it rather than rejoice and marvel at the grace of God they reject it. They are like men who come out of darkness into the light and then because the light is too much for them, they scurry back into the darkness.

Thus, we have the second pillar of the reformation, Grace Alone

John came without drink and in the wilderness. Jesus's first miracle was to turn water to wine, and he did not shun the company of sinners. Both proclaimed the Grace of God. Forgiveness of our sins is freely given and the way to heaven is open because Jesus died for us.

That message is what is important not our expectations of what John should wear or whom Jesus should talk to.

John came outwardly looking one way, Jesus came looking another. Both came covered in God's grace. The clothing of God's kingdom is grace alone.

### **But wisdom is justified by her children."**

Gibbs argues that a better translation is "and wisdom is declared innocent of her works." If this is the case Jesus' words are a little sarcastic "Wisdom is set free of her children." This would imply that Jesus himself is Wisdom, and he is being judged not based on "the work of wisdom" but on other criteria.

It would be like someone who said, "I don't like that mechanic because he doesn't tell jokes." Or if someone said I don't like Pastor Ude because he doesn't keep his garden weeded. These are not the criteria upon which you ought to judge a pastor or a mechanic.

Wisdom is often personified in the OT and in the Rabbinical writings. Here wisdom is personified as Jesus. The personified "wisdom of God" which is the person of Jesus and to a lesser degree John the Baptist, ought not to be judge based on what they eat, what they wear, or whom they preach to. Rather the wisdom of God ought to be judged on the content of the message preached and how it fits with the message that was given in the OT.

This is why the Bereans are so highly praised in the NT. They alone in the whole NT judge the wisdom of God based on the OT prophets. When Paul brings them the message of salvation through Jesus, they search the scriptures diligently to see if it is so. The Pharisees didn't do it. The Apostles didn't do it (they did much later after Pentecost, but not at first). Saul didn't do it, not until God blinded him with "science." The Bereans alone said, "Hey this preaching by Paul needs to be judged on the basis of the OT prophets."

Thus, we have the third pillar of the reformation scripture alone. We don't judge John or Jesus or Martin Luther or Pastor Ude or any other pastor on any basis other than scripture. Is there preaching confirmed by the scriptures?

God's word alone is our authority for God's truth. God does not conform to our expectations. We need to conform to his word.

Our text today is largely a negative one. Jesus telling us what the kingdom of God is not. It cannot be taken by force. It will not conform itself to our expectations. It cannot be judged by its outward appearance.

Our epistle reading gives us the positive side:

**Romans 3:21-22** <sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, <sup>22</sup> even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all<sup>1</sup> who believe. For there is no difference;

It is faith alone which can see and enter the kingdom. It is grace alone which adorns the kingdom of God. It is scripture alone which is able to reveal the kingdom.

In all times and in all places, there will always be men who attempt to grasp the kingdom by force for their control for their profit. The grace of God is ours by faith. May God grant that this scripture, this faith, and this grace remain in our hearts unto the end.

**Amen**