

The Violent Take It By Force

Jesus said: 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**

This verse always troubled me. First, violent people seem contrary to much of what we believe as Christians. Second, how could Heaven suffer violence? How can Heaven be overrun and taken by violent men? That certainly didn't **sound** like a good thing! Third, the phrase "And from the days of John," why was that clause in there? It seems to specify that what Jesus is talking about starts with John and then moves out from that time. Why was that? Therefore I had difficulty understanding the verse, period, which lead to not having any way to practically apply it. Then it occurred to me -- Holy Spirit prompting? -- that I was assuming I knew what "violent" meant. It occurred to me to look up the definition of "violent." When I did, a whole new light was cast, not only on this verse, but the entire passage of which it is part.

violent, adj. 1: acting with or having great physical force. 2: caused by violence. 3: passionate: as, violent language. 4. intense: as, a violent storm. **And violence**, n. 1. physical forced used so as to injure or damage. 2. intensity; severity: as, the violence of the storm. 3. desecration. 4. great force of feeling, etc. ; passion.

The Violent Take It By Force

And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. **Matthew 11:7-15**

Let's address the issues I had one by one, then wrap the whole thing up by explaining the passage in its entirety.

ISSUE ONE: IS VIOLENCE CONTRARY TO WHAT WE BELIEVE AS CHRISTIANS?

First, is violence contrary to what we believe as Christians? At first blush, even if we think violence means physical force, it would **seem** so. However, if we examine scripture we must wonder. Certainly the prophets and kings from the Old Testament could be deemed violent. For instance, when Samuel told Saul not to take any prisoners of the Amalekites people nor any of their animals, and Saul directly disobeyed by bringing back not only animals but the **king** of Amalekites, Samuel, the prophet, **the man of God**, grabbed a sword and...

Then said Samuel, Bring ye hither to me Agag the king of the Amalekites. And Agag came unto him delicately. And Agag said, Surely the bitterness of death is past. And Samuel said, As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women. And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the LORD in Gilgal. **ISA 15:32-33**

Or, take for instance, Nehemiah, rebuildier of the walls of Jerusalem.

And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves. **Nehemiah 13:25**

Even Jesus does not fit the "meek" mold the world and most Christians try squishing him into. Jesus was radical in His beliefs and His teachings. Jesus got right into the faces of, and used harsh and indicting language against, the religious leaders who mislead and condemned the people while puffing themselves up. Jesus said He didn't come to bring peace, but a sword, and to turn "brother against brother." Watch Jesus purge the temple: And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves; And would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple. And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves. **St. Mark 11:15-17**

When you get down to it, even turning the other cheek is an "in your face" gesture. These are but a few examples. If they surprise you, get into your Bible and learn what God's men and women of old were really like. Therefore, I think my original supposition on this, that even violence when it means "physical force," may not be as totally contrary to the Christian way as I had initially assumed, but that the view of wimpy meek Christians willingly presenting themselves to the lion and lining up for the slaughter is more a concept the world has imposed on the people of God in order to hypnotize us into doing **just** those things. The world wants to be rid of us and has done a good job selling us **its** description of what we should be. That said, for the most part I don't believe this passage is referring to physical force but fervency of spirit, passion, intensity, and great force of feelings. In that sense, again, my original supposition that "violence" was anti-ethical to Christianity was wrong. Passion and intensity are required for the Christian life, both to see us through and to get our message over to the world. People are drawn to passion. James tells us "The effectual **fervent** prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Prayer must be violent if it is to be answered. In fact, as we are about to see, Jesus is telling us that now, if we are to receive **anything** from God it will require passion and intensity -- **violence!** -- on our part.

ISSUE TWO: HOW CAN HEAVEN SUFFER VIOLENCE?

"the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force"

The image I had in my head of this was something akin to the French storming the bastille, the gates of a mighty fortress being overtaken by a teeming horde and shattered as it is overrun and destroyed. However if we consider violence to mean "fervency of spirit, passion, intensity, and great force of feelings" we realize a completely different image. Also note that the passage refers not to Heaven as a physical location but to the **Kingdom** of Heaven. Now we see the passage meaning that Heaven is moved by, responds to, and acts in accordance **with** passion and intensity -- along the lines of John the Baptist's behavior. Jesus is holding up John the Baptist as an example of how those "in the Kingdom of Heaven" are required to act. Further, it is **only** those who are passionate and intense, only those who move and act with great force of feeling that take the things offered by, the privileges that come with being a member of, the Kingdom of Heaven.

ISSUE THREE: WHAT DID JESUS MEAN BY FROM THE DAYS OF JOHN?

There are actually three lines that work together here to complete the meaning of this passage:

- 1) "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." In other words, *That was then, this is now*. A change has taken place. Also note the phrase "them that are born of women." As Christians we are born of water **and** of spirit. We are born again, rebirthed by the Spirit of God, and "in the kingdom of heaven."
- 2) "And from the days of John the Baptist until now" After John, things are different. "The days of John" have become a turning point after which everything is different from all that went before. Again *That was then, this is now*. A change has taken place.
- 3) "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John." Up till John, you had the law and the prophets -- now you have something else. It was all building up to John prophesying about Jesus, it was all to reveal Jesus, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Now that Jesus is here, now that He is about to fulfill the law (which, in this context, existed to reveal Him), things are different.

So, indeed Jesus **was** saying that previous to John the walk meant one thing, but after him it meant another. The rules had changed.

THE PASSAGE REVEALED

[7] And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? [8] But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. What did you curiosity seekers leave your cities and go into the wilderness expecting to see? A sideshow? A wimpy little fellow, blown about by every prevailing current? [9] But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. [10] For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. If you went out to see a prophet... you were **right!** John **was** a prophet! But... and even you did not realize this... he was not **just** a prophet, he was **more than a prophet!** for John was the messenger who would come before, and point you to, the Messiah. [11] Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. Yes, John was more than you realize. He was a great man. In fact, John was the **greatest man who ever lived**. But now -- the Kingdom has arrived, and as great as John was, the least in the Kingdom is greater than he. Do you understand? The least in the Kingdom is **greater** than the best that man has to offer!

[12] And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. Now that John has ushered in the Kingdom, new rules are in effect. A change has taken place! Your old ways will no longer suffice. Coming to God, receiving from God, has new requirements! Now, if you are to gain anything from Heaven, if you are to belong to the Kingdom, you must be as John was -- passionate! Fervent in your belief! Powerful! Intense! Moving with great force of feeling and spirit! [13] For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. Everything you have done was only for the time leading up to John's ministry, when he would usher in the Kingdom and introduce you to Messiah. John has ushered in this new way! The Kingdom has come! Passion and intensity are the new ways! [14] And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. [15] He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. If you have spiritual ears to hear, then you understand, **I am** Messiah. The law will no longer save you. The prophets will no longer save you. Now, you must become a part of the Kingdom. And the only way to be a part of the Kingdom is to be as John was, be as **I am**.

Is there something you want from God? Be passionate in your belief! Be intense in your faith! Be fervent and effectual in your prayers! Walk boldly up to the throne! **Take** it! Take it with the great force of your emotions! Jesus has **commanded** it, for now it is the **only** way to receive **anything** from His Kingdom. "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." **Revelation 3:15-16**

Say this outloud: Jesus, I believe that God is your Father and that He sent you from Heaven to Earth to die in my place so I would have eternal life and no longer be condemned. You are now in charge of my life. What you say goes. I will turn away from those things I knew were wrong but did anyway. From this moment on, I choose to follow you. Thank you, Jesus, for saving me. And thank *you* in Jesus's name, Father God, for adopting me into your family, loving me, and calling me your own. *Amen*. (Romans 10:9, John 3:17, John 5:24, John 1:12)

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