

## THE VIOLENT KINGDOM

Matthew 11:7-15; 20-24

Key verse 12 *“And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force”*

### INTRODUCTION

No one likes violence, but sometimes violence is necessary. When Elon Musk forces his way into the United States in Treasury and threatens to steal your personal information and your social security check, then it might be time to get violent.

Sometimes the devil will act so ugly that you have no other choice but to get violent.

Well, someone might say, “Now, Reverend you know you shouldn’t be talking about violence. That isn’t the Christian thing to do.” Well, I say, “Why not talk this way? Jesus did!” Jesus said in our key verse, *“... the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.”* The kingdom of God is a war zone; it is a battlefield; it is a place where the forces of hell clash against the angelic host of heaven in a violent spiritual warfare, and we are included in the battle!

The violence of this warfare affects every part of our existence. It affects our bodies; it affects our minds; it affects our peace. The stress, the chaos, and the pressure produced by the violence can be so intense we find ourselves on the verge of collapse. But although we feel that sometimes we’re about to break, our charge is to hold fast, because Jesus is our battleaxe, and he will fight our battles.

In our lesson today, John the Baptist serves as a major character in understanding the violence of the kingdom. There are three movements to the narrative. I begin with *“An Unparalleled Witness”* in verses 7-11.

### LESSON

#### UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS (Mt. 1-6)

John’s present circumstances caused him to become impatient and assume more than what he should have.

John expected more than what Jesus was giving. He too was looking for political deliverance.

When God doesn’t meet our expectations we should be offended

#### AN UNPARALLELED WITNESS (Mt. 11:7-11, 13-15)

John the Baptist was Jesus’ witness to Israel and the world. He was that voice crying in the wilderness. He was not the speaker of the hour. It was his job to introduce the speaker, who is Jesus. John the Baptist was an extraordinary witness. He is an unparalleled witness, which means there has never been anyone like him then or since.

When John came on the scene, he came forth with an unusual appearance and unusual habits. He was dressed in camel’s hair, eating locust and wild honey. To the general public and the religious leaders of Israel, he was a circus, a joke. As a result, many didn’t take him seriously. So, Jesus challenged their erroneous attitudes towards

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John. He said in verse 7, *“What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?(alcoholic) 8) But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft (fancy) garments? (a wealthy man) Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses.”* Jesus pressed them on their erroneous assumptions by asking, what did they expect to see? Did you think you would see an alcoholic? Did you think you would see a wealthy man? Finally, he asks one more question in verse 9. *“But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.”* Jesus was saying if you were looking for a prophet you found one in John the Baptist, but not just any prophet. John was one of the greatest prophets. He was great because he was the official witness of the Son of God.

John’s appearance was the fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah and Malachi. He quotes them in verse 10, *“For this is he of whom it is written: ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.’” (vv. 13-15).*

John the Baptist was not only a great prophet, but he was a great man, a man who had the admiration of Jesus. Look at what Jesus had to say about John in verse 11, *“Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist...”* Jesus thought the world of John. He admired him!

Let me ask you a question. If someone interviewed Jesus, and the interviewer asked Jesus what he thought about you, what do you think Jesus would have to say?

Now even though John was a great prophet and a great man, his status in the kingdom of God is no better than yours or mine. Notice what Jesus said at the end of verse 11. He said, *“but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”* What did he mean by that? He meant that John was no more favored than you or I, because “the Baptist” was not included in the New Testament covenant of redemption. He is an Old Testament figure. But you and I are more favored than he because we have been redeemed by the blood of the cross.

When we’ve been born again we become a privileged people. We have a special favor; a favor that the Old Testament saints did not have. We have more “favor” than the angels.

### **A VIOLENT KINGDOM (Mt. 11:12, 16-19)**

That’s the Unparalleled witness, look with me, now, at *A Violent Kingdom*. Since the fall in the garden, there has been violence. Jesus was not exempt from this violence. From the very moment he came into this world—born in a manger—the violence against him began. For instance, Satan used the violence of King Herod to attempt to kill him. When Jesus began his ministry, the religious leaders attacked him, tried to stone him on more than one occasion, and ultimately crucified him. All of Jesus’

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entire 33½ years of life on this earth was filled with violence, some seen and some unseen.

But despite the efforts to destroy him, Jesus won the victory over the violence of death, hell, and the grave when he conquered them all by rising from the dead. By doing so he placed all things under His feet. The Bible says, *“For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet”* (2 Cor. 15:25).

Now, although violence has been a part of our existence ever since man’s fall in the garden, it would appear, from the text, that the violence went to another level when John began his ministry. Verse 12 says, *“And from the days of John the Baptist until now...”* That has to do with John’s showing up in the wilderness. His appearance on the scene began a rise in the spiritual warfare between the angels of heaven and the demons of hell.

You see, Satan lost his devilish mind when Jesus showed up! As a result, the spiritual battle reached a fever pitch. The warfare was just as intense as the warfare that took place in heaven. But at no time did the forces of heaven back down. Both sides fought all the way to the cross and to the tomb. Jesus said at the end of verse 12, *“the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.”*

Listen, God’s angels aren’t wimps, they’re winners! So are we! The forces of heaven won! When did they win? It happened early Sunday morning when Jesus got up out of the grave! One can only imagine the intense conflict that unfolded in the tomb and in hell. Intense though it was, the devil and his imps were no match for Jesus. He defeated every demon, every foul power, and every unclean spirit. This was the reason the apostle Paul was able to shout the victory cry when he said, *“O Death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory!”* (1 Co. 15:55).

### **A WOEFUL FATE (Mt. 11:20-24)**

Although Jesus and the forces of heaven won the war, unfortunately, they lost some of the battles. Despite our efforts, and despite our good intentions, not everyone will be saved. We see that reality in verses 20-24.

Verse 20 said, *“Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent...”* Jesus calls out three cities, Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum for ignoring his word in spite of the miracles that were performed in their presence. Because of their rejection, they would receive *A Woeful Fate*.

We have no record of what was done in these cities, but John 21:25 tells us that the Bible did not record everything that Jesus did. It is an incomplete story. But the Lord will tell us all things when we get home.

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Because of their stiff-necked rejection, Jesus makes an interesting statement in verses 22 and 24. He said, *“But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you...But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you.”* Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom were Gentile cities that were hit with the judgement of God because of their wickedness. What Jesus was saying was that Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, which were Jewish cities, were in greater trouble than the Gentile cities, because they knew better, and when you know better you ought to do better! They had the truth, but they chose to ignore it! Ah, beloved, when God reveals himself to you believe him!

Jesus had performed miracles in their sight and they still rejected him. Therefore, because **most of His mighty works** were done in these cities, they experienced a greater light, which also required a greater accountability. Therefore, they would receive a greater judgement. When Jesus said that **it will be more tolerable** for certain cities in the day of judgment, He implied that there are in fact different degrees of judgment. Some will be punished more severely in the final judgment than others.

I want to say to all who are under the sound of my voice. We are a people without excuse. We have heard the gospel, therefore we have a greater responsibility before God to receive that message, failure to do so means a greater punishment.

### CLOSE

I stopped by to tell you today that we are in a violent war. That violence is all over God's kingdom. It is seen in the middle east, it is seen in the Ukraine, it is seen in our city streets, it is seen in the Whitehouse, and our house.

Therefore I challenge you to put on the whole armor of God that **you may be able to stand**. *“For we do wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”*

So put on your armor and fight. Fight like David fought Goliath. Fight like Samson fought the Philistines. Fight like the angels fight the hounds of hell. I know we get tired. I know we get discouraged. I know that sometimes we want to quit. But don't. Instead, fight on, fight on, fight on until you hear Him say well done...