

THE GOSPEL THEME

„And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by force.” Matt.

11:12

There is to-day more of what is commonly considered Gospel preaching than at any previous time in the world's history. From thousands of pulpits it is heard twice every Lord's day, and again at the mid-week meetings, while thousands of printing presses are preaching through weekly and monthly periodicals, and millions of tracts, pamphlets, and books. And added to all this, there are the extra efforts of what are termed lay-evangelists, Christian associations, salvation armies, etc.

But as we listen to the many, many voices, we hear sounds strangely out of harmony with the commission of the great Head of the church, whose leading these all profess to follow. It would seem that if the commission was ever heard by this great army of preachers, it must have been forgotten. What was it? Harken again to the Master's voice: „Go ... and as ye go, preach, saying, *The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.*” (Matt. 10:6,7.) And again „Let the dead bury their dead; but go thou and *preach the kingdom of God.*” (Luke 9:60). And the Lord's disciples are taught also not only to preach—to publicly proclaim the coming of the kingdom of God, but to pray for it, saying: „Thy kingdom come—thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven.”

If that prayer is ever to be answered—and it certainly will be, since he who dictated it could not err, and would not teach us to ask for anything out of harmony with Jehovah's will—then there will come a time, when the kingdom of God will be actually SET UP in the earth, and when as a consequence of the setting up of that kingdom, His will *shall be done ON EARTH, even as it is done in heaven.* You who have so frequently declared your firm belief in answer to prayer, do you believe this? Shall not this united prayer of all the saints for nearly nineteen centuries past, dictated by the unerring wisdom of our Lord, be answered? Most assuredly it will.

The coming of the kingdom of God, and the things pertaining to that kingdom—the death of Christ as the necessary preliminary work to its introduction, and the resurrection of Christ, the assurance and pledge of it, was the great theme of the Apostles' preaching, and the inspiring hope of the early church.

When John the Baptist came preaching repentance, it was with the strong incentive, never before offered, „The kingdom of heaven is *at hand*.” Jesus preached the same truth, saying, „Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” And this was the spirit of the teaching of all the Apostles. Men generally desire to be in favor with the ruling power, and the coming kingdom of heaven meant a coming reign of righteousness, wherein the righteous would prosper and the wicked would be punished. If the kingdom was *at hand*, then how natural and proper to urge it as an incentive to repentance and righteousness.

Ever since the fall repentance had been preached: but none before John were commissioned to preach the kingdom of God at hand, and other truths relative to it. This is the Gospel, the good news not made known in other ages. As Jesus said, „The law and the prophets were until John; since that time the kingdom of God is preached” [Sinaitic MS. omits with evident propriety the words „*and every man presseth into it.*”] But the law and the prophets though shadowing forth and foretelling the coming kingdom, could never be clearly understood until the Gospel unraveled their mysteries.

Was it in any sense a fact, that the kingdom of heaven was at hand in John’s day? Nearly nineteen centuries have passed since, and still the powers of darkness reign and the kingdom of heaven is not yet SET UP. Still the wicked flourish and the righteous are oppressed. If we consider the expression as referring to the *setting up* of the kingdom in power and glory, it was true, and Jesus’ words in John 16:16 will help us to understand the statement. To his disciples, when about to leave them, he said, „*A little while*, and ye shall not see me: and again, a *little while* and ye shall see me;” and the *little while* has been the entire Gospel age.

Ah yes, it is a little while *from God’s standpoint*, with whom a thousand years is but as one day. (2 Pet. 3:8). From God’s standpoint, and we are invited to take the same position of observation, it was but a „*little while*” to the second advent of Christ and the establishment of his kingdom. The kingdom was *just at hand*, and the king about to be anointed for his glorious reign. And if this was true in John’s day, how emphatically true is it at the present time to which the prophecies point as the hour that just precedes the dawn of the glorious day of that reign! Jesus did not explain to the early Church just how long God’s „*little while*” should be, as it would have seemed a very long time to them.

But it would seem that in some sense, the kingdom of heaven had an existence in John’s day; for Jesus said, „*From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by force.*” Since the kingdom when *set up* cannot suffer, but must reign triumphantly, we conclude that the text refers to those elements of the kingdom in existence, and being developed during this age.

In John's day, Jesus, the Lord's anointed, was present, and he and the few disciples who then received him as their Lord, were then the only elements of the kingdom; but during the Gospel age others have become subject to him; and his reign of righteousness has been over them to mould and fashion them according to the divine will. So far as the imperfections of the flesh permit, God's will is done by these as it is done in heaven. It should be clearly manifest that none but those who are *entirely consecrated to God*, are of this kingdom, though many claim to be and think they are of it, who do not claim *entire* consecration.

The subjects of Christ, the heavenly king, hearken to, and obey his voice. They do not turn every man to his own way and plan regardless of the Commander's instructions, though the command is to march through danger, privations, loss and suffering. But to those who recognize Jesus as king and become subject to him before his glory and power are manifested, there are exceeding great and precious promises, to be realized when his kingdom is set up. They shall be accounted worthy to reign with him. It was to give to this class the privilege of *suffering* and as a result, of *reigning* with Christ, that the kingdom began to be preached so long before it was to be actually SET UP or established in power.

Of this class only, are our Lord's words first quoted true. These suffer violence at the hands of the present reigning power of this world—Satan, and the subjects of his kingdom, and the pages of history from the days of John the Baptist until now, present the dark record of the violence suffered by those who are of the kingdom of heaven.

Violence persecuted and crucified our King, stoned Stephen his faithful martyr, beheaded Paul, crucified Peter, roasted others by fire, tossed them on piercing forks, and heaped upon them every indignity that fiendish wickedness could devise. And even in these days, when the „salt of the earth” (See July issue) has to some extent purified human society, and counteracted the terrible influence of Satan's reign, still the kingdom of heaven suffers violence. Their names are cast out as evil, they are despised and rejected; their business interests suffer, and they are counted as fools and fanatics. The violent take the kingdom by force—With overwhelming force of numbers and wealth they subdue the little handful of the saints, trample and crush their influence, and hinder the progress and spread of the heavenly kingdom. Thus by the dominion of evil, is made possible for the Church, a baptism into suffering, even unto death.

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But is this all so, because the Heavenly King lacks the power, and is unable to bring victory to his faithful followers? This reminds us of the words of Jesus when about to perform the symbol of his death—“*Suffer it to be so now*, for thus it becometh *us* [himself and his church] to fulfill all righteousness”—the righteousness of God's law which required this sacrifice.

God is able, and will bring victory to the tried and faithful few who have been loyal subjects of his kingdom in these stormy times. These we are told are to be kings, and priests, and joint-heirs of the *throne* with Jesus Christ, when in due time the kingdom of heaven is SET UP—placed in control. Though the violent prince of this world lays them all low in death, the power of the Almighty will bring them forth to certain victory.

We would call special attention to the date Jesus mentions in the text. It dates „*from the days of John the Baptist.*”

Other children of God, preceding the day of John the Baptist, suffered in like manner as those who have suffered since. But notice, Jesus does not say, From the days of John the Baptist *the children of God* suffer violence, but the *kingdom of heaven* suffereth violence. Then those children of God who lived before that time were not of that kingdom to which Jesus referred—the kingdom of Christ. How could they be, when as yet there was no king anointed?

The kingdom of heaven then began to have an existence when Jesus was anointed to be the King—at the time of his Baptism—“in the days of John the Baptist,” after which time as John said, he began to decrease (in influence) and Christ to increase. Though ever since then, his kingdom has been in existence, yet this has been the time of its humiliation and affliction; its littleness and poverty have made it the subject of contempt and ridicule, while its unwavering opposition to the spirit of the world, has incurred their hatred and persecution.

So it was also true in John’s day that the kingdom of heaven was then *at hand*—about to come in the sense mentioned. But to-day it is true in a still more glorious sense; for the time for the setting up and exaltation of the kingdom is at hand. The prayer of these loyal subjects henceforth to be joint-heirs of the throne with Jesus, the king, is about to be answered. His kingdom is just about to come, in its glory and power, and the blessed outcome of the victory of that kingdom, will be, that God’s will shall be done in earth as it is done in heaven.

If then, we would be faithful to him who has called us to preach, let us see to it that we preach the Gospel (good news) of the kingdom, and that we be not diverted from it by any side issues. The kingdom, and things pertaining to the kingdom—its character, its permanence, its sure foundation, its blessed influence, and the cheering and inspiring fact that its setting up in glory and power is just *at hand*, should be the theme of every true servant of God. And if we have been faithful disciples of the Master we cannot be ignorant of these things, and if we know them how can we refrain from telling them. „Go ... and as ye go preach, saying, the KINGDOM OF HEAVEN *is at hand.*”

MRS. C. T. R.

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