



GracePoint: A Weekly Sermon Discussion
31 – The Violent Kingdom of Heaven

Announcements:

6/1 @7:00 -

Corporate
Prayer

6/2 @6:30 -

Grace Group

6/5 @8:30 -

Sunday School

6/7 @ 6:30 -

Women's
Bible Study

ICE BREAKER: Is there any topic you would call yourself an “expert” in?

READ: Matthew 11:11-15

If I am being honest, sometimes seminary classes feel a little ridiculous. I mean, when in the course of my life will a 17 page paper just written on one verse be useful? Well, it turns out there may be times when it is useful, specifically when that one verse is something I will later preach and teach on. About a year ago I wrote a paper on Matthew 11:12, and while I will spare you from much of the detail, there are some things about this verse that make it both useful and applicable (If anyone is struggling to sleep I can get you a copy!). So today we will be diving into the thought that: “Since the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.”

At the heart of what makes this verse interesting are two thoughts that center on the same Greek root (the root is *bia* in case you are dying of curiosity...) that most English translations render “violence” and “violent”. So we will look at these in turn. The first is the thought that “the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence.” There are a few schools of thought on how to best understand this, but the best option is to assume that this means that the kingdom of heaven is under siege. The point Jesus is making (which is backed up by the context) is that the kingdom of heaven, we can reiterate: the great and powerful kingdom of heaven, is not without enemies. It is a warning against the thought that just because you are a part of God’s kingdom it will be all “rainbows and gumdrops.” Ultimately, this is a graphic reiteration of a point Jesus has been making since 10: when the Gospel goes out there WILL be opposition.

DISCUSS: Why is it important for us to understand that the kingdom of heaven “suffers violence”?

The second thought is, to me, the more interesting one. Jesus continues his kingdom talk and states: “the violent take it by force.” The ultimate question here is this: is this a good thing or a bad thing? If you think Jesus is saying a positive thing then you would read this like this: The kingdom is under siege and the violent (here something more like brave, strong willed, and forceful) people are doing all they can to grasp it. The negative view looks to these violent men as something more like false teachers, or people who would warp and manipulate the Gospel of Jesus to suit their aims and goals. To understand this we have to make a decision! On one hand Jesus could be saying that the kingdom of heaven is under attack, so fight and strive to lay ahold of the kingdom. On the other hand Jesus could be saying: The kingdom of heaven is under siege, so be very careful because those attacks will come constantly from all sides. These are two very different thoughts!

DISCUSS: Which reading makes the most sense to you? Why?

But one thing that makes this more rewarding than just some paper on this subject, is we can get to the heart of the issue, which is: So what? It is one thing to know that this is a hard passage to understand, it is another to wonder what we gain from trying to understand it! So I will share what I closed my paper with:

However, in this seemingly dark message there is hope. Jesus is here telling us that the violence that we suffer is typical of Christian life, we should not be unaware or surprised when this happens. But even more importantly we can know that as members of the kingdom we have been given access to the riches of the kingdom of heaven. Though it has suffered violence we can rejoice knowing that Jesus is the king who reigns victoriously. As Jesus reassured his disciples: “So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.” (Matthew 10:26)

DISCUSS: What rewards can we gain from a richer understanding of this passage? Another way I ask this question: what particular message would the Bible be missing if this verse wasn’t there?