

VIOLENT REJECTION

(Matthew 11:11-12)

Matthew 11:11 (NKJV)

11 “Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Jesus is here talking about the privileged position that John had as the forerunner to Christ. In this life there was no higher privilege. And yet all those who go into the kingdom will find themselves in an even greater position than that which John enjoyed during his earthly ministry.

Luke 10:23–24 (NKJV)

23 Then He turned to His disciples and said privately, “**Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see;**

24 for I tell you that **many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen** it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it.”

MANY prophets desired to see the Messiah and did not. But John did. John had the high honor and esteemed privilege to intimately go before the Messiah and prepare the way for Him and then to announce Him to the nation. Others had vaguely prophesied about the coming Christ, but John saw more clearly and more intimately than them all. All the other prophets vaguely looked forward to this day -but John had the privilege to personally usher it in.

And yet in the kingdom all God’s children will have an even greater access to Jesus than John ever knew. All the saints in the kingdom will see on a greater level than John ever did. Thus, even the least of the saints in the kingdom will be in a greater position than John was in his earthly ministry (cf. Jn. 3:29).

“This was not intended to discredit John, for Jesus had been exalting him, but rather to signify how blessed and honored one is to be in the kingdom.” – ***Ed Glasscock***

Note the kingdom was yet future as John is regarded as NOT yet being in the kingdom at this point. This is important because some want to claim the kingdom is just a spiritual reality, when in fact biblically it is physical reality in which Christ will physically reign in Jerusalem on David’s throne.

Matthew 11:12 (NKJV)

12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.

This is a difficult verse because it can legitimately be understood in two different ways, and both are theologically true. And so good commentators have differing views here and this is not a place for strong dogmatism.

The issue is how to understand the phrase “**suffers violence**”. In the Greek the verb “**suffers**” (Gk. *biazomai*) can legitimately be taken as either being in the middle or the passive voice and how you take it determines how you interpret what is being said.

Middle is reflexive in the sense that something does it to itself with the idea then being “**the kingdom violently forces its own way**”. In contrast passive is the idea of the action being forced upon it from the outside with the sense being “**the kingdom is being treated violently**”.

"So then in Matt. 11:12 the form can be either middle or passive and either makes sense, though a different sense." (Robertson's *Word Pictures in the NT*).

Middle Voice Nuance

“The truth of the kingdom presses ahead relentlessly [forcefully advancing] and only the relentless [determinedly committed] press their way into it.”

An argument for this view is the cross reference in Luke 16:16 where the same verb translated as “**suffers**” in Matthew 11:12 is translated as “**pressing**” in Luke 16:16. In Luke it clearly shows the conversion commitment of believers in spite of opposition.

Luke 16:16 (NKJV)

16 “The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it.

However, “**suffers**” in Matthew 11:12 can just as legitimately be taken in the passive sense and if taken that way here is the sense.

Passive Voice Nuance

“The truth of the kingdom suffers violence [from rebel religious leaders] who are seeking to seize it.”

A most compelling argument for this view is the cross reference of Matthew 23:13.

Matthew 23:13 (NKJV)

13 “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For 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.

“This verse parallels Matthew 11:12-13 where the religious leaders were bringing violence to the kingdom program. Since they resisted the King they were hindering the kingdom’s coming and the ability of the people to enter it. The rejection of Jesus by Israel’s leaders ‘effectually shut the door to the Kingdom offering by God through His Son upon earth.’” – **Michael Vlach** in *He Will Reign Forever*, p. 373

In light of the surrounding context emphasizing persecution and what John was going through this passive interpretation probably makes the most sense. But again, it can legitimately be understood either way.

However, note a couple of things.

In matters of interpretation CONTEXT is KING! We noted in Chapter 10 there are two great emphases. There is the matter of delegated power to the apostles to do kingdom sign miracles; but then there is also a strong emphasis on persecution that would accompany the ministry.

Matthew 10 Context – Persecution...

10:16 – “sheep in the midst of wolves”

10:22 – “you will be hated by all for My name’s sake.”

10:28 – “do not fear those who kill the body...”

10:34 – “I did not come to bring peace but a sword.”

10:36 – “a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.”

This whole context of predicted persecution leads into the experience and question of John the Baptist in chapter 11. So, the context is one of emphasizing expected persecution. In addition to this the context right after dealing with John’s imprisonment goes on to address “this generations” rejection of both John and Jesus as seen in 11:16-19.

So, right in the MIDDLE of this whole extended subject of persecution and rejection is Matthew 11:12 which in keeping with the greater context would

seem also to relate to the violent opposition of people in response to the kingdom message. Jesus is saying this hostile rejection is to be expected.

Matthew 11:12 says the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence “from the days of John the Baptist” (the beginning of his ministry) – which at the time Jesus was speaking would have been for about 18 months.

It was John who burst on the scene and started preaching “**repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand**” (Mt. 3:2). Then Jesus followed suit with the same message, also saying, “**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**” (Mt. 4:17). This message was met with violent opposition by the religious leaders and those rejecting it.

In addition to the contextual argument the most natural rendering of the language in this setting translated as “*violence*” (*Gk. biazetai*) followed up with language of “*take it by force*” (*Gk. harpazousin*) would seem to indicate this is the action of those hostile to the kingdom message.

Taking this as a violent response on the part of the unbeliever, which I tend to do for the reasons stated, the idea is that kingdom truth has been under attack since the time John began to preach it as seen in opposition to John the Baptist and then to the Christ He pointed to.

The pattern is clear. Persecution is to be expected. Yes, the kingdom was being offered. Yes, there were “kingdom signs” being exhibited. But the kingdom was not here yet! And until it comes those rejecting the message of Christ will respond violently to it. This is to be expected!