

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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Entering the Kingdom *Violently*

by Dan Trygg

“Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: ‘What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?’⁸ What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses.⁹ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.¹⁰ This is he of whom it is written, “Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You; he will prepare Your way before You.”¹¹ Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist, but the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. But from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven advances-violently, and violent people seize it for themselves.” Matthew 11:7-12

“No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”¹⁴ The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they were scoffing at him.¹⁵ And he said to them, ‘You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly admired by people is revolting in the sight of God.’¹⁶ The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone violently-forces his way into it.” Luke 16:13-16

John the Baptist was the epitome of a radically dedicated individual. He had been set apart for God while still in his mother’s womb (Lk. 1:15). He grew up probably as a Nazirite, never allowed to eat or drink any fruit of the vine as a sign of His dedication to God. Both parents were deeply devoted to God themselves. Assuredly, they raised their only son with care and diligence to impress upon him the high and holy nature of God, and to value the wonderful calling the angel had spoken over his life. John responded to the example and instruction of his parents, and devoted himself to knowing and serving God. There were few people who were as fiercely committed to God as he was. **His zeal and passion for God drove him to extremity in his life, choosing to separate from mainstream society to seek God in the desert. He lived a simple life, subsisting on locusts and wild honey, freeing up great quantities of time to draw near to God in study, prayer, meditation, *listening* and *waiting*. He modeled his life after the prophet Elijah, who had also lived in the wilderness, and had been used of God to call the Israelites of his day to repentance and a fresh commitment to God (Lk. 1:17,80; Mk. 1:6; cf. I Kg. 17-18; II Kg. 1:8).** Elijah was considered to be the greatest of the OT prophets. He also was rough, and seemingly appeared out of nowhere, having no known public ministry before his confrontation before King Ahab. John apparently was also virtually unknown, waiting in the wilderness for his prophetic calling. **In both cases, the word of the Lord came to these men, leading them to radically change their lives.**

Elijah had been a settler in Gilead. The word of the Lord prompted him to travel westward across the Jordan, and make an appearance in the king’s court, declaring in the name of Yahweh that there would be no more rain nor dew, except by his word. Of course, this sounded crazy, so no one took him seriously, ...until the land was parched by drought. Then the king began to search high and low for this “crazy prophet”. Meanwhile, the word of the Lord told Elijah to hide himself in a steep ravine of a brook that enters the Jordan on the eastern side. Because he could not hunt and gather without risking being seen, God had the ravens supply him with food for quite some time, until the brook dried up. **Overnight, because of his service to God, he went from being a quiet farmer in Gilead to being a *hunted man*, living in seclusion in a cave.** When the water dried up, the word of Yahweh came to him again, instructing him to travel to Zeraphath, a small village halfway between Tyre and Sidon of the Phoenician empire, the very heart of wicked queen Jezebel’s hometown neighborhood. There, God had “commanded” a widow to provide for him. When Elijah traveled the sixty plus miles into enemy territory, careful to avoid detection, he found a poor widow gathering sticks by the city gate. He asked her for a drink. Her answer revealed that she was a worshiper of Yahweh. She had only a handful of flour left, and a tiny bit of oil, yet God miraculously provided for her, her son and the prophet for the remainder of the three years of drought. Because everyone in the neighborhood knew how impoverished she was, no one even suspected that she could be harboring a fugitive. Then, in the third year, **God’s word came again to Elijah, instructing him to go to Israel and show himself to the king, for God was ready to send rain on the earth. Boldly, Elijah returned to publicly confront the prophets of Baal.** God answered in a mighty demonstration of power, and the false prophets were destroyed. The point is, when God called Elijah, his life was dramatically changed. **Whether by bold action, or years of silence and hiding, Elijah was never able to go back to being a simple frontier settler, again. Obedience to God brought about violent, radical change in this man’s life.**

John the son of Zacharias probably had been told of the angelic vision his father had received. He had an unusual heart for God, and he dedicated himself to preparing himself for his life’s work for the kingdom of God. **His life, too, was radically changed when the word of the Lord came to him.** Instead of the quiet of privacy and

solitude in the remote desolate stretches of the desert, God instructed him to go to the fords of the Jordan and preach to the pilgrims passing by. His radical and sudden appearance, and his powerful message, calling Israel to repentance and telling them that someone greater than he was soon to come, captured the imagination and curiosity of the pilgrims. Immediately, he was thrust into the center of national attention, and great crowds of people were gathering to hear him preach. People began to repent and seek God afresh. **John's message advocated a drastic upheaval of the religious institutions of their day.** Its effect was to level the playing field. **The "high" were brought "low", and the lowly were lifted up. Everyone was to come to God in the same way.** They had to leave the past behind, whether past sins or past accomplishments. **John preached a baptism of repentance toward the forgiveness of sins.** The baptism was an immersion in water, but **it symbolized death to the past, and a renewed consecration to God.** *This was a violent crushing of the status quo in peoples' minds.* Their hearts were being prepared for the ministry of the One who John said was soon to come. John was only sent to prepare the way for this greater Man of God. When the time was right, **God used John to identify Jesus to the crowds,** and he began to direct some of his followers to Jesus. **Once Jesus' ministry was launched, however, John's began to fade.** Finally, when he confronted King Herod concerning his unlawful marriage to his brother's wife, he was imprisoned.

When Jesus spoke of John in Matthew 11, He asked the people what they went out in the wilderness to see, someone blown about by the wind? Someone making a comfortable living in a cushy religious position? No. They went to listen to someone that they recognized as a genuine prophet, ...someone whose life *showed* that he was serious to hear from God, ...someone who would *not* compromise the message, ...someone they could *see* was walking the walk, not just talking the talk. **Jesus stated that John was greater than all who had gone before him.** What does that mean? Jesus was talking about John's very strategic and significant role. He was standing at the transition of two very different ages. **John was the last and greatest prophet of the old covenant age.** Like Moses, who faithfully led the people to the edge of the promised land, but did not go in himself, **John had declared that the Kingdom of God was "at hand",** that is, it was "impending" or "on the verge" or "about to come", **but he himself did not personally experience its clarity and power.** *For that reason, the ones who are least in the Kingdom are "greater" than John.* They may not be more committed or more faithful, but they have more available to them than John had, ...and their *role* is even *more strategic* than John's had been! **John's role was part of the preparatory process, ...part of the staging for the main event. The main event, however, is the assault of planet earth by the Kingdom of God. Everyone in the Kingdom of God is to participate in this work.** Everyone in the Kingdom has been made new and is equipped with the indwelling Holy Spirit to empower us for this mission. **We have way more going for us than John the Baptist ever experienced.**

After this declaration about John, **Jesus made a somewhat cryptic remark about how the Kingdom spreads "violently", and how "violent people seize it".** This is an instance where the Greek words can be understood in more than one way. Either the verb is passive, meaning that the Kingdom is "suffering violence" or is "being violently treated" and "violent men are forcefully capturing it", or it is saying that **the "Kingdom is pressing through, wreaking violent upheaval" on the status quo and the world system, and those who are entering the Kingdom are willing to grab hold of it no matter what the cost. They are willing to do violence to the status quo of their lives.** They are desperate, determined, ...they *pursue hard* and *press through* whatever stands in the way of their experiential relationship with God and His Kingdom. What fits the context better? Does it make sense to say that God's Kingdom was suffering violence, and violent men are taking it by force? No. There was no visible, tangible Kingdom, nothing to attack. In the context, however, Jesus had just talked about the dramatic signs of the Kingdom evident in His ministry: "the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, ...lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, ...the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them." **Kingdom ministry under Jesus was turning things upside down, setting people free, doing radical things no one could have imagined, and reaching out where no one else was going.** Similarly, *those who would enter the Kingdom and participate in Kingdom ministry will be those who are willing to go out of their normal routine, who dramatically turn their lives upside down, break up old patterns and press hard after God.* Like the prophet Hosea said, "Sow with a view to righteousness, reap in accordance with kindness; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek Yahweh until He comes to rain righteousness on you" (Hos 10:12; Lk.9:23).

"Violence" may sound like an overly strong word, but it was chosen to drive the point home. Nothing changes if nothing changes. **How serious are you to know God and find His purpose for your life?** No risk, no gain. Sometimes, no *pain*, no gain. **Are you willing to count all things as loss, so that you might gain Christ? Are you willing to put aside, press in, and push hard for a breakthrough?** Do you want to be part of something that makes a difference? **God still wants to completely overthrow the strongholds of darkness. Are you willing to do whatever it takes to be a co-worker with Him in that endeavor?**