

# Kingdom Report

Week 12 May 2018

## Kingdom Discipleship or Kingdom Violence

I want to teach you something about the importance of small group discipleship by explaining one of the most misunderstood sayings of Jesus...the violent take the Kingdom by force.

I am continuing my series on the importance of small house groups in God's discipleship program and I want to also explain why most home cells are not as effective as they should be because they lack one of the most important elements of discipleship....a covenant relationship.

But to get there let me take a detour to one of the most misunderstood sayings of Jesus in the gospels that if you see it in a new light it will help you to understand how the Lord wants to spread His kingdom on earth....by understanding how not to.

Here are a very strange two verses well known from Matthew 11:11-12....

***"Verily I say unto you Among them that are born of women there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force."***

Your immediate reaction normally is, But if John is the greatest ever and not even he is in the Kingdom than frankly who is? Another reaction is what I have experienced in my long wilderness wonderings among various "deeper spiritual warfare" groups that get into very loud shouting, singing dancing, demonstrations and cries of 'Lord we violently attack the enemy" etc trying to give substance to this scripture that we should be very militant in our prayer expression.

But here is what is actually going on with what Jesus is saying....and it has great bearing on how we do Kingdom strategy.

John the Baptist was about 6 months older than Jesus. He started his ministry before Jesus at age 30 like Jesus did. From what information we can gather John's active ministry was about a year into the ministry of Jesus if not shorter. So he was preaching repentance and baptism for about a year to year and a half before he got executed by Herod Antipas.

So when Jesus said "from the days of John the Baptist until now" its a relatively short period of time. So what violence to the Kingdom of Heaven is Jesus referring to?

Well you need to understand the spiritual and political ferment that was going on at that time. Everyone had read the prophecies of Daniel about the 70 weeks and the coming of the Messiah and the restoration of Israel. Just read the writings of Josephus (Antiquities of the Jews Book 10, Ch.11) and he goes into great detail how accurate Daniel was as a prophet, which was a chief reason why he joined the rebellion against

Roman occupation. The Pharisee sect had arisen about 150 years before this as a "back to the law of God" movement to explain to the Jews the reason the Lord had abandoned Israel was they were not keeping the law. So everyone got very religious and punctual about keeping every small part of the law...because that was the condition for the kingdom to be restored to Israel and Daniel's prophetic clock was ticking...the end times were coming. Then came John the Baptist on the scene...the Pharisee movement had degenerated in the eyes of the people...John called on everyone to repent and be baptized...an acknowledgement that I need to rededicate myself. Everyone came, common people and Pharisees...a mass movement of... its the end times and the kingdom is coming. John was acknowledged as the Elijah forerunner, it was now any moment for the Messiah to appear and lead the restoration of Israel against her enemies.

Which is where the violence started....the violent wanted to take it by force. It was time for "Bible days are here again..." take up swords, for Yahweh the Lord of Battle stands for Israel! But when John came on the scene and announced that Jesus was the expected one there was great scepticism. Yes He had the right pedigree, a son of David. But His message was not that of a great leader gathering the people for kingdom restoration. Even John from prison began to doubt Jesus...."Are you the one or do we expect another?".

This whole Messianic "back to Jewish roots and restore the kingdom to Israel" movement culminated in the great triumphal entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem...the crowds went wild, palm leaves out, shouts of "Hosanna to the Son of David". Hosanna meaning "save we pray" (or Sieg Heil in German!). So in one statement they are acknowledging "You are king and saviour"....so now lets get on with the kingdom restoration.

Lets be honest folks...if we preachers had been there and said to the crowd "All of you who want to accept Jesus as Lord and saviour. put up your hands!" how many of those masses of people would have responded? Truthful answer: All of them....because that was exactly what they were openly confessing...Jesus Son of David you are our king and saviour.

So why does John, who by the way was there at that triumphal Jerusalem city wide revival meeting say...."***He came unto his own but his own received him not, but as many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God...***" (John 1:11-12) Surely those crowds were not only ready to receive him but did so joyfully?

Ok, to answer that brings us back to the real gospel of Jesus Christ and the Great Commission He gave us...."***Go into all the world and teach all nations....teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you and lo I am with you even unto the end of the world***"

Now I am going to say something controversial....somewhere we got some wrong idea about both the Kingdom of God and how it is brought to earth. We got the idea that if we hold a city wide crusade or mass media outreach or some idea that if we just get information to people and then get them to put up their hands ...then we have done our duty to preach the gospel into all the world and then the end can come.

God's Kingdom program is "make disciples" of all nations. Jesus showed the way. He made disciples of 12 people spending years with them....and rejected the adulation of the masses and their attempt to crown Him king of the Jews.

Now here is the crucial difference why all those before John the Baptist, with him the greatest of the great saints of the Old Testament why the least in the Kingdom is greater than them all....

John His disciple caught it...that us why he spent so much space in his gospel writing about it....Jesus spoiled the whole king of the Jews restoring the kingdom to Israel with just absolutely strange teachings....unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no part of me....I in the Father and the Father in me, you in me and I in you...

This was the great secret to the Kingdom of God...Christ in me the hope of glory! More than a hundred times in various ways in the New Testament you will read "in Him" or "Christ in us" or "we in him"...

Nobody before Jesus came had God living in them...God was in the tabernacle in the Holy of Holies. But after the resurrection...all things changed...now we are the temple of Christ.

Which brings us back to discipleship....

Because we carry this incredible treasure in us, because we have this great privilege that none before had, not Moses, not Elijah, not Abraham...we alone in our era of God's history have the great honour and responsibility to manifest the character and presence of God on earth....because God has "temples" in us.

But to do that we need to be discipled to learn how to think and act and respond as Christ on earth. We need to learn how to be the image bearers of God in the earth. Now this is the important part for you to understand:

### **Covenant Relationships and God's Program of Discipleship**

Your entire life experience here on earth is your discipleship training program. To do this the Lord puts severe restrictions on you to teach you to manifest the character of God and not your fallen character. How He does this is to put you into covenant relationships to reshape you.

A covenant relationship is where you are bound to another person and they do their part of the covenant and you do your part. And this relationship shapes you.

You start with a child/parent covenant relationship. You are severely restricted in what you as a child can do by parents who love you...until you grow up and move onto other covenant relationships.

You have a life covenant relationship with a wife or husband. You bind yourself to one another to be accountable to each other. You grow and mature in so many ways.

You have a covenant relationship with an employer. You give the company 8 hours a day of faithful and productive work. They pay you for your time and skills.

You have a covenant relationship with your government and fellow citizens. You all agree to a set of rules of law that everyone must abide by and you pay your government taxes to enforce those laws.

These covenant relationships cause much pain but also enrich our lives. In each of these covenant relationships there are rules, there are promises of mutual benefit, there are commitments. They shape our lives. God tells us to do all these relationships "as unto the Lord". Children obey your parents, husbands/wives love and obey. Employee obey and work diligently as unto the Lord. Employer, pay a fair wage for work. Citizens obey your rulers and honour them.

And the church? Where is the covenant relationship? Membership does not mean much these days. You don't like what the preacher is preaching, go to another church. There is hardly any discipline to speak of and if the ministry does discipline someone they just go down the road to another more accommodating church.

This is where your cell group comes in. You need for your sake of growth in Christ to be in a committed covenant relationship with a group of people...and yes 12 meeting in a home is a good discipleship group. What do you covenant?

You decide to get down to honesty. You commit to one another to help each other achieve spiritual growth in each other's lives. This comes from sharing one with another. Problems at home or at work or with relationships. Studying scriptures together. Someone to cry with, someone to rejoice with. Someone who is there who understands what you are going through. Above all trusting that Jesus keeps His promise that where you gather He is there. He is continuing the discipling of the 12 as He did when He walked with the apostles. Trusting that the Holy Spirit is active in the lives of each of your cell group and that supernaturally the Spirit of God is able to activate any of the gifts of the Spirit as He wills through any person in the group.

You see the gifts of the Spirit work through love. When you love someone and they are going through a trial there is an overwhelming compassion that comes and it activates your spirit to reach out to God for the other person. Supernatural wisdom and guidance when you need it. People who will listen when you need to unburden.

This does not come from casual meetings. This type of discipleship works its miracles when a love bond grows between people which produces compassion, which activates the gifts and fruits of the Spirit.

I will have more on this in future. I am going to call this a "Koinonia home group". Koinonia is the Greek word in the Bible used for "fellowship". This is deeper than acquaintance. Unfortunately that is what most church is about. But I understand we cannot have Koinonia with all the people in our church fellowship. But ask the Lord... "he who the Lord brings together"...the Lord will supply if you ask sincerely for a deepening of spiritual life through Kingdom fellowship.

Just a further comment on the evangelical church today with regards to my above comments about the Kingdom of God:

Jesus did not then 2000 years ago come to establish a restored Jewish kingdom and He is not coming back to do that. The evangelicals are doing the same mistake...America is bombing all the enemies of Israel to "stand with Israel". The Kingdom of God once again suffers violence and the violent think they can bring it by force. They expect Jesus to come in the clouds with an army of angel to slaughter the enemies of Israel in a miraculous show of force. The only violence that Jesus did was to come back and destroy Jerusalem and the Temple and Israel as He said He would. Making sure that everyone understands that He has His own ideas of who is the real Israel, where is the real Jerusalem and where is the real temple of God.

There is no earthly kingdom of Jerusalem. There is a heavenly Jerusalem. There is no earthly new temple to be built in Jerusalem and even if there were Jesus would destroy that one just like He did the previous one.

God's Kingdom extension is not by going to come by taking control of government or Hollywood or big business or any other mega organizational plans. It happens by establishing the Lordship of Jesus in the hearts of individuals through discipleship and the best way to do that is do it the way Jesus did it...12 people at a time. And each of the those 12 living and working in a world and a society that needs to see Jesus in our lives. It is not as spectacular as a whole city of Jerusalem waving palms and crying out Jesus save us....but it gets the real job done of "Christ in us the hope of glory."