



# *The King's Ransom*

Matthew 20:28

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Text

Matthew 11:1-24

Topic

Jesus tells His disciples they will suffer violence from human and demonic foes who oppose the Gospel

Title

*"The Violence of the Lambs"*

Introduction

Movies from the 1980s like *Terminator* or *Die Hard* were rated R at the time of their release – but if they were released today, they'd probably be rated PG-13.

That's because PG-13 movies today contain more violence than the R-rated films of the 1980s, according to a report recently published in the *Journal of Pediatrics*.

Television and the gaming industry have their own ratings systems. TV shows, for example, can carry letter ratings of D (for suggestive dialog), L (for coarse or crude language), S (for sexual content), or V (for violence).

**As we read our text this morning, we're going to see that the world we live in as Christians has a rating. Jesus rates it SV, for *Spiritual Violence*.**

Look with me at verse twelve:

Mat 11:12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers **violence**, and the **violent** take it by force.

I'll explain the verse more fully in a moment, but it means that there are sinister spiritual foes and forces at work, both human and demonic, to oppose the message and the messengers of the Gospel.

Most of the time we call this opposition "spiritual warfare," and while that is an accurate, biblical term, it doesn't go far enough in describing the effect this opposition has on us as believers.

Spiritual warfare sounds almost romantic as we imagine ourselves locked in combat with the devil and his forces, wearing the full armor of God, wielding the sword of the Spirit.

Spiritual violence - well that sounds more like I got ambushed and assaulted when I least expected it and am left victimized, wounded, and confused.

We will see in the imprisonment of John the Baptist that spiritual violence can cause us to doubt, to stumble - even to be offended with God.

If you are honest, you'll admit you've felt like that. If you haven't ever felt you were the victim of spiritual violence, just wait. Your ambush is being planned.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Don't Allow Spiritual Violence To Stumble You, and #2 Don't Allow Spiritual Violence To Silence You.

## #1 Don't Allow Spiritual Violence To Stumble You

(v1-15)

Our key verse, verse twelve, is by no means easy to interpret. Some teach that it means that the kingdom of Heaven is forcefully advancing as godly believers press forward boldly sharing the Gospel. One example is the New International Revised Version where it reads, "Since the days of John the Baptist, the kingdom of heaven has been advancing with force. And forceful people are taking hold of it."

While that is a possible interpretation of the words, it seems more likely that Jesus was describing violent opposition to the kingdom of Heaven. For one thing, it describes to a 'T' the situation of John the Baptist. He was currently suffering violence from those who opposed the Gospel. He was in prison and would shortly be beheaded.

Besides that, we will see that John's question at the beginning of the chapter suggests he thought the kingdom of Heaven somehow had been halted by violence rather than it being forcefully advanced.

John was definitely a victim of spiritual violence and, as such, he can minister to each of us in this SV rated world.

Mat 11:1 Now it came to pass, when Jesus finished commanding His twelve disciples, that He departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities.

At first this verse seems like it should have been the last verse of the previous chapter. But when we read verse two, we see that it sets up the question of John the Baptist.

Mat 11:2 And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples

Mat 11:3 and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"

John heard about this most recent campaign of Jesus' during which He and His disciples did many miraculous "works." Thinking about those works, he wondered if Jesus were "the Coming One," which was an official title of the long awaited Jewish Messiah.

John had predicted that Jesus would perform a work of judgment. His exact words were, "His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will clean out His threshing floor" (Matthew 3:12). Jesus, however, was only going around doing works of compassion. After many of those works He told folks to keep quiet about Him. He seemed anything but the "Coming One" John had prophesied.

Before we say anything else, we need to ask and answer the question, "Did John really have doubts about Jesus?"

Some say no, he did not, and that this question was more for his disciples, to encourage them to look to Jesus.

**John really did have doubts.** We know that he did because, when John's disciples get to Jesus and ask Him the question, The Lord says to them,

Mat 11:4 Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see:

The Lord answered John - *not* the disciples of John.

As godly a man as was John the Baptist, he had come to a place of doubt. Why?

John had identified Jesus as the "Coming One," and that the kingdom of Heaven was at hand, but now some time had passed and the kingdom had not come. Instead, John was in prison, shortly to have his head cut off for speaking out publicly against the adulterous relationship between Herod Antipas and his brothers wife, Herodias.

Things were not working out the way he might of anticipated. He was a victim of spiritual violence by those who opposed the message and the messengers of the Gospel.

Mat 11:4 Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see:

Mat 11:5 The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

These phrases are almost exact quotes of passages in the Book of Isaiah that describe the works that will identify to Israel her "Coming One." They are the credentials of the Messiah of Israel.

One quick note: Isn't it fascinating that The Lord equates preaching the Gospel to raising the dead? *It's because preaching the Gospel does raise those who are spiritually dead to newness of life.*

Jesus answered John, but I have to ask, why didn't The Lord just say "Yes, I'm Him"?

I've found God's answers like that to me over the years. There is an element of faith involved. Why give an easy "Yes" or "No" answer that would satisfy our curiosity but do nothing to help us both grow and grow closer to Him?

Mat 11:6 And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."

This is where it gets real. Jesus recognizes that when His followers are victims of spiritual violence by the enemies of the Gospel, there is a tendency to become "offended" because of Him. Another word would be "stumbled."

That is the sinister intent of the spiritual violence. The devil, and those taken captive by him to do his will, assault you, attack you, in order that you will blame God, be offended with Him that things didn't work out the way that you planned and that He promised.

And please note - **things weren't going to get any better for John.** Yet Jesus said he would be "blessed" if he endured rather than becoming offended and stumbling.

I'm 58 now. There are a lot of things in my life that didn't, or aren't, working out the way we planned and the way we think God promised. Over the years, and up to today, violent spiritual forces have assailed us.

We can be offended with God; we can be stumbled. Or we can be "blessed" by looking at The Lord and His wonderful works, knowing that we are in a war with violent enemies but that our God always, ultimately, redeems - working all things together for the good.

Mat 11:7 As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?"

Mat 11:8 But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

Mat 11:9 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.

The crowd who heard the exchange between Jesus and John's disciples may have thought John was being rebuked by The Lord. Not at all. Turning to the crowd, Jesus reminded them of John's impact on the kingdom of Heaven.

John wasn't given to vacillating. He wasn't one to quit when things got rough. No, he was God's prophet - and a mighty one at that.

When you've suffered spiritual violence, you feel anything but mighty. You need to forget your own appraisal of your life and service and let The Lord speak to you.

John's sole purpose in life, his entire ministry, was to announce that the kingdom of Heaven was at hand, and that Jesus was the "Coming One." He did that - and he did it faithfully.

**It would not come to pass in his lifetime.** In fact, everything he had lived for would seem a dismal failure when Jesus was crucified; and John would not even live long enough to see Jesus on the cross. Some forerunner; some Messiah.

God saw - and always sees - further. John was faithful and that is what God requires of His servants. We can affect, but cannot control, the outcomes of our serving Jesus. There are too many variables - like the violent opposition of our enemies.

Mat 11:10 For this is he of whom it is written: 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER BEFORE YOUR FACE, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.'

The Lord draws from the Old Testament to establish that John **was** the forerunner, and that He (Jesus) **was** the Messiah.

I'm sure more people than just John were trying to reconcile the promises of God with the reality of the situation. Jesus was letting them know that for all the violence being done against both John and Himself, God would redeem it for His glory.

Mat 11:11 "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.



There are a lot of reasons John was "greater." He was the last of the Old Testament prophets, and the only one who saw Jesus - who announced Jesus to the world. In that sense alone he was "greater" than all of his predecessors.

But for all that, even the least citizen of the kingdom is greater than the one who announces its coming. From this point on even the least among believers would know more than any of the prophets who had come before - including John.

We are greater in privilege.

Mat 11:12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.

John and his message started something. His message was to repent because the kingdom of Heaven was at hand. It was an attack on the kingdom of this world and upon the ruler of this world, Satan. It was like a declaration of war.

One author put it like this: "Jesus is saying that His bringing of the kingdom of Heaven has activated the kingdom of darkness into violent warfare on an unprecedented scale. What John was experiencing... is one small fallout of this violent activity from the demonic kingdom against the kingdom of Heaven."

It's a spiritual violence that is ongoing and reaching into all our lives.

Mat 11:13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

The "prophets and the law" summarizes everything contained in the Hebrew Scriptures we call the Old Testament. This is Jesus' way of saying things were about to change. Either the prophesied kingdom would be established or, if rejected, He would build His church. It was the end of a spiritual era.

Mat 11:14 And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.

Mat 11:15 He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

The Old Testament, in the Book of Malachi, said that Elijah would precede the coming of The Lord. John came in the spirit and in the power of Elijah and, if the Jews would have received Jesus as their King, John would have fulfilled that prophecy in a spiritual sense.

As it is, we believe, from reading the Revelation of Jesus Christ, that Elijah himself will physically return during the Great Tribulation to precede the Second Coming of Jesus Christ back to the earth. He will be one of the two witnesses, the other being Moses.

Have you been the victim of spiritual violence? Are you being victimized right now? Expect it. Endure it. Do not stumble, do not become offended with your Savior.

We live in an age of spiritual warfare and it isn't pretty.

## #2 Don't Allow Spiritual Violence To Silence You

(v16-24)

Jesus turns His attention to the generation of people He was seeking to reach with the offer of the kingdom of Heaven. They didn't want to hear what He was saying. They refused to go along with His message of repentance and faith.

Mat 11:16 "But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions,

Mat 11:17 and saying: 'We played the flute for you, And you did not dance; We mourned to you, And you did not lament.'

Mat 11:18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.'

Mat 11:19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children."

Jesus compares the generation of Jews He was among to spoiled children.

- If someone wanted to play a wedding game, with flutes and dancing, they refused.
- If someone wanted to do just the opposite, and play funeral, they still refused. There was no pleasing them.

John the Baptist came along and lived a simple, strict life, out in the wilderness; listening to him was like attending a funeral. The Jews said he had a demon in order to ignore his message.

Jesus was just the opposite. He attended dinners and parties with sinners. They called Him a drunkard and a glutton and a friend of sinners. That way they didn't have to 'play along' with His message, either.

God's "wisdom" was on display in the very different ministry styles of John and Jesus. They were both His "children" in the sense that they belonged to Him and were sent out by Him. They preached the same message - but they did it differently.

By any and every style possible God was seeking men, not willing that any should perish, but that all would come to eternal life.

There are a lot of ministry styles - all the way from the strict John-style to the spontaneous Jesus-style and everything in between. As long as we remain true to the Word of God, style is not important. As long as a person holds to the essential doctrines of biblical Christianity, and realizes its truths are non-negotiable, the way they present the Gospel is wide open.

The Jews were like spoiled children who would not listen, who would not play along, with God's program for them. Nevertheless Jesus went about their cities and towns and villages preaching the Gospel and doing the mighty works of the "Coming One." He was not silenced by their opposition.

Mat 11:20 Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent:  
Mat 11:21 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

Mat 11:22 But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.

Mat 11:23 And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

Mat 11:24 But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."

The Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon, and the godless cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, would have repented had they seen the miracles that Jesus and His disciples performed.

Capernaum had been "exalted to heaven" by being privileged to have the Messiah live there. Five of the ten miracles recorded in Matthew eight and nine were performed in Capernaum. Yet her greater privileges only brought greater responsibilities and greater judgment.

Jesus understood that there was a "day of judgment" coming and that there was Heaven to gain and Hades to avoid.

Hades is described by Jesus in the Gospel of Luke as the temporary abode of dead nonbelievers who are awaiting resurrection to stand before the Great White Throne Judgment of God and be cast alive into Hell.

In light of the incredibly serious eternal consequences for nonbelievers, we cannot allow spiritual violence against us to silence us. We are the messengers who are to take the message of the Gospel as we are going throughout the world.

Eternal destinies hang in the balance. We need to press on despite the violence.

When you suffer violence, be encouraged by this declaration by the apostle Paul:

2Co 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.

2Co 4:8 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;

2Co 4:9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed -

2Co 4:10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

2Co 4:11 For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

Paul was no stranger to spiritual violence, and you see that in these words. You also see him rising above his circumstances, trusting God for an ultimate outcome.

At the cross, Jesus vanquished the enemy. But what He has achieved has not yet been manifested. The devil and his demons fight on. The outcome of the war is settled, but there are battles to be fought for the souls of men who are perishing.

One author said, "as sure as The Lord came the first time to defeat His cosmic enemy and our oppressor in principle, just as certainly He shall return again to defeat him in fact."

A parting thought. John doubted Jesus. Jesus defended John; or we might say He acted as an advocate for John.

**The Lord is your advocate, too.** He knows all about spiritual violence and it's effects.

As your Advocate He is in Heaven defending you to the Father from Satan's accusations.