

# Fear Not Little Flock

By Jim Golden

I don't know if you are like me, but I have a few pet-peeves when it comes to interpretation of scripture. One of them is the portion of scripture where Jesus is telling the people about John the Baptist. Many translations have Jesus declaring that from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of God suffers violence and the violent take it by force. Most preachers interpret that to mean that we must "suck it up" and by violence of soul and effort gain our place in the kingdom of God. It is put forth as being good and acceptable. However, upon closer inspection we see that the opposite is true. Read this portion of Scripture from the Message translation and it takes on a completely new persona. Starting in verse 11 of Matthew 11 Jesus declares, "Let me tell you what is going on here: No one is history surpasses John the Baptizer; but in the kingdom he prepared you for, the lowliest person is ahead of him. For a long time now, people have tried to force themselves into God's kingdom. But if you read the books of the Prophets and God's Law closely, you will see them culminate in John, teaming up with him in preparing the way for the Messiah of the kingdom." (Vv 11-14).

It does not sound like Jesus is giving his approval of taking the kingdom by force to me. On the contrary, it sounds like he is declaring the end of one age and the beginning of a new age, which is the age of grace, inaugurated through his death and resurrection. One of the reasons this bothers me so much is because the ones who embrace the philosophy of taking the kingdom by force are often caught up more in movements and causes than they are in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Within Christ's Body there is a significant amount of diversity, which already has the potential to divide us. We see clicks formed by all manner of social distinctions and the very thing that Jesus came to accomplish, the total dissolution of social walls or divisions, is the result this approach. Unknowingly or unwittingly, we set ourselves apart from other children of God because they are not on fire as we are. We declare that we are on the cutting edge of what God is doing in the earth and the truth is we become a member of the elite group of people that, if we are not careful, run the risk of falling from grace. Pride comes before destruction and the haughty spirit before the fall.

As I write this it is "Good Friday". I do not know if that is coincidence or divine providence, but I am reminded of the incredible price that Jesus paid to secure our position in HIS kingdom. I am also reminded that the most important thing to him is our personal intimate relationship with him. There is so much going on in our world today that vies for our attention that we have little or no time devoted to nothing but Jesus. Our intimate personal relationship with Jesus is the one thing we all have in common. It alone will see all of our desires fulfilled, not our causes or efforts.

In closing this writing, I would like to quote another verse that has meant a lot to me. "Fear not little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32 KJV) The Message reads, "Don't be afraid of missing out. You're my dearest friends! The Father wants to give you the very kingdom itself."

In our desire to be and experience all that is available to us in the kingdom, we must remember that everything from God is an undeserved gift received through faith in His benevolence. We must become defenders of the faith lest we become boastful and forget our former estate.