

PM Matthew 11:1-19 & Luke 16:13-31 The Kingdom of Heaven suffering violence

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[0 : 00] reading in the scriptures from Matthew's Gospel. We have two readings from the Gospels this evening, in Matthew and later in Luke. But firstly, in Matthew and the 11th chapter.

Matthew chapter 11 and verse 1. And we'll read to verse 19. In Matthew chapter 11 and verse 1. This is here. God's Word. When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities.

Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?

And Jesus answered them, Go and tell John what you hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up.

[1 : 20] Lepers are cleansed, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John. What did you go out into the wilderness to see?

A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing?

Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in king's houses.

What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, more than a prophet, this is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.

Truly, I say to you, among those born of woman, there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

[2 : 29] From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.

For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you're willing to hear it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

But, to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, We played the flute for you, and you did not dance.

We sang a dirge, and you did not mourn. For John came, neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He is a demon.

The son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Look at him, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

[3 : 40] Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds. May God bless this reading of the word to our souls as we turn again to a psalm of worship in Psalm 40.

We'll turn again to the scriptures of the New Testament, and this time in the Gospel of Luke, page 1055, the 16th chapter of Luke, and verse 13.

Read from verse 13, because it connects us with what has gone before. And there's a connection, you'll see, as we read this passage, with the previous passage we read in Matthew.

So reading from verse 13 of Luke, chapter 16. 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. The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things and they ridiculed him.

[5 : 08] And he said to them, you are those who justify yourselves before men. But God knows your hearts.

For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God. The law and the prophets were until John.

Since then, the good news of the kingdom of God is preached and everyone forces his way into it. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the law to become void.

Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery. And he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.

There was a rich man who was clothed in a purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus covered with sores who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table.

[6 : 29] Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side.

The rich man also died and was buried. And in Hades being in torment he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.

And he called out Father Abraham have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue for I am in anguish in this flame.

But Abraham said, Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things and Lazarus in like manner bad things.

But now he is comforted here and you are in anguish. And besides all this between us and you a great chasm has been fixed in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able and none may cross from there to us.

[7 : 46] And he said, Then I beg you Father to send him to my father's house for I have five brothers so that he may warn them lest they also come into this place of torment.

But Abraham said, they have Moses and the prophets let them hear them. And he said, No, Father Abraham but if someone goes to them from the dead they will repent.

He said to him if they do not hear Moses and the prophets neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.

And may God add his blessing to this reading of his word. Ten years ago I was as I often did when I visited Jack's uncle I was speaking with John Dodds in his home and it's always very stimulating to speak to Jack's uncle.

John then was in his 90s but he remained sharp in mind and always stimulating and always witty too.

[9 : 15] On that occasion he would often put you on the spot and test you out and that occasion he asked my thoughts on the meaning of Matthew chapter 11 verse 12 which we read earlier.

In Norman what do you understand by Matthew 11 12 I'll read it again from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence and the violent take it by force.

I remember an occasion I don't remember what I said exactly but I remember we did look at a parallel verse which we also read earlier from Luke chapter 16 and verse 16 where we read the law and the prophets were unto John since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached and everyone forces his way into it.

The words of our Lord Jesus Christ are always intriguing and challenging and need pondering and reflection.

What did he mean when he made those remarks? I'll give an illustration of what I think our Lord is describing.

[10 : 51] Some of you will remember Clive and Ruth Bailey. Ruth is still alive. Clive was taken home to glory on the 31st of December 2021 rather suddenly.

Clive had taught at the school to be set up by the Free Church in Lima Collegio San Andres. He taught there in the late 1970s and 1980s and he came home and taught at a school near Air.

In the meantime after a while the school in Lima fell on hard times. there isn't much public education in that country.

It was a private school with scholarships and it was running at a loss and the pupils were few. And Clive was asked by the then Mission Board to go out to Lima to see if he could revive the school.

And he went out I think it was about 2008. he worked hard. I remember seeing a photograph of him standing at the school gates before the first pupil arrived.

[12 : 21] He'd be there at the school gate every morning welcoming the pupils on their way in. I think probably knowing everybody by name. after five years of Clive being there as head teacher

the school had a waiting list.

It had become so popular. I think he was here in 2013 visiting us in Dumfries. He used to preach for us when he could from time to time.

In those days he was an elder and air free church. And he said to us, I made a note of it, he said to us that when he was out in Peru, he just returned from Peru, that statistically you could say on average every sixth person you would speak to in the street in Lima, would say to you that they were an evangelical Christian.

Every sixth person. He said you go to church, a large church on a Sunday morning and you have to form a long queue to get in.

And you would wait in that queue until the previous congregation exited from the church. Then you would all file in. And when you came out, there was another long queue waiting to get in.

[13:45] And so it would go on through the Lord's Day. If anybody in the 1960s had said in Lima, Peru, that such would be the situation in Lima, they would have thought you were crazy.

But such was the work of God in that city in the early 21st century. What had happened?

What had happened? I think something like what we read in the scripture. Taking Luke's gospel, for example, we read the law and the prophets were until John.

Since then, the good news of the kingdom of God is preached and everyone forces his way into it. Everyone forces his way into it.

Or as in Matthew we read, the kingdom of heaven is suffering violence, and the violent take it by force. I want to focus particularly my thoughts from the verse in Luke 16, 16, which sets that into context a wee bit.

[15:07] But you may have noticed that when we read Matthew's account in Matthew, it was about the transition from the ministry of John the Baptist to the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And the same transition is recorded by Luke, not in the passage we read, but much earlier in Luke, in Luke chapter 7. But it seems that Jesus' comment is held back by Luke to chapter 16.

Or it is possible that, of course, our Lord Jesus said the same sort of thing twice. We see evidence of that in the Gospels. And we know that every good teacher has to repeat things many times.

And we know that from the Gospel that our Lord Jesus did that too. But Luke perhaps may have held back the comment for a particular reason to set it into a context of chapters 15 and 16 of Luke's Gospel.

There's a possibility. And if that's so, the context is that there are crowds of people wanting to hear Jesus. Not the respectable kind of person, but the tax collectors and sinners will all read it drawing near to Jesus.

[16:35] We read that in verse 1 of chapter 15. Meanwhile, the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling that Jesus was consorting with, as they put it, sinners and even eating with them.

So crowds of people are gathering to hear and to listen to the Lord Jesus. They wanted to hear Jesus, the remarkable things he was saying, the remarkable things he was doing.

And we noticed the contrast between what the Pharisees called the sinners and the Pharisees themselves, the so-called respectable people.

There's a great contrast between them. And Jesus highlights some of these contrasts in chapter 15 and chapter 16, particularly in the third parable in chapter 15.

He highlights the contrast between the so-called respectable and the so-called disreputable, particularly that third parable of the prodigal son.

[17:41] But it's there too in chapter 16 when we have the contrast between the rich man who was feasting sumptuously every day and a respectable man in his society, contrasted with the poor man who would eat if he could the crumbs which would fall from the rich man's table.

And Jesus drawing that contrast to good effect, pointing up, pointing out and asserting that the leaders, those who were considered to be something in his day, had to take heed and to listen and to watch and to consider their ways and to seek the way of repentance.

He said to them in verse 14, you are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts.

He knows your hearts. He refers in the same context to the law, the ten commandments, and it would be easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the law to become void.

And we know that Pharisees made it easy for a man to divorce a woman, and Jesus in verse 18, I think, is being critical of the Pharisees in this, when he writes, when he says, everyone who

divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband, commits adultery.

[19 : 48] The Pharisees were experts at evading the pressures of the law and finding the way around it, and they were missing out on the coming kingdom of God, into which the so-called sinners and tax collectors were pressing and violently entering the kingdom.

not taking no for an answer, but desiring Christ and his word above everything. since the days of John the Baptist, Jesus says, people are pressing in, they're forcing their way in.

He says the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's gospel is suffering violence. The violent is taken by force. These men and women were gathering around him.

Think of that poor woman who invaded the feast in the Pharisees' home who was anointing Jesus' feet with her tears and wiping his feet with her hair.

She was an example of one of taking the kingdom of heaven violently with force, striving to get to Jesus.

[21 : 28] And that's the kind of incident we see recorded in the gospel. People desperate for Jesus, wanting Christ and his word. Because the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is so beautiful, so attractive, the good news of the forgiveness of sin, new life in Christ Jesus.

These men and women wanted to become members of the kingdom of God as a desire. And they wouldn't want to leave it until tomorrow, they wanted it today. They were burdened, they wouldn't take no for an answer.

I've just got some six illustrations all taken from Mark's gospel, which illustrate men and women who are desperate for Christ and his kingdom and his word.

In Mark chapter 1 and verse 40, we read of a leper who came to Jesus. God's and we notice his posture, he's on his knees.

He's not on his feet, he's on his knees. And we read that he pleads. And when we read that, when he pleads, that's an argument. He's stating his case.

[22 : 55] We just hear one phrase he utters, he says, if you will, you can. if you will, Lord, you can. Do all things for me.

We think of the paralyzed man in Mark chapter 2 and his four faithful friends. They came to bring Jesus, bring their paralyzed man to Jesus on his bed.

But they had a problem. There was no access to Jesus. The way was barred because there were too many people around him. But despising the normal conventions, they broke a hole in the roof and let down Jesus at his feet.

They didn't say to themselves, oh, we'll wait till tomorrow. By tomorrow, Jesus might have gone. In that context, Mark, he says, I can't stay in one place.

I've got to keep on going around the cities to preach the good news of the gospel. By tomorrow, he may have gone. So they broke convention and let Jesus down through the roof.

[24 : 10] We think shortly later in Mark chapter 5, Jesus crossing the Sea of Galilee to the east bank. As he comes ashore and steps out of the boat, a wild man sees him.

We read the scriptures from a distance. How did he know it was Jesus? I don't know. But he knew it was Jesus. Did he run away?

He ran towards him. And when he gets to Jesus, what do we read? He falls to the ground. This is pleading.

This is abasing himself. himself. I want what you can give me. The kingdom of heaven was suffering violence.

The man was on his face pleading with Christ. I was thinking of Jairus, the synagogue ruler, also in Mark chapter 5, shortly after that event, with only one child, a 12-year-old daughter, who was sadly dying.

[25 : 25] And here's a synagogue ruler in the midst of a large pressing crowd, not worried what people will think of him and his status.

But we read too that he fell at Jesus' feet. Jairus did. And we read that he begs, he pleads, he will not take no for an answer.

And he pleads to the Lord. He humbled himself. He didn't mind what people would say about him falling at the feet of Jesus.

He wasn't ashamed. He was glad to do it. We think later in Mark chapter 7 of the foreigner, the Syrophenician woman up north, outside the borders of Israel.

She is a little girl too, also in great trouble, greatly disturbed in spirit, cast down. Let's look at her mother. She hears about Jesus, she comes to the house, she too falls at Jesus' feet, and we read that she begs, she pleads, and this time we're given some of the detail of her pleading, some of her begging.

[26 : 53] We're told the detail by Mark, she argues forcefully with the Lord. She won't give up. We read how our Lord Jesus commends her for her forceful arguing with him as he draws out her face in him.

Remember lastly too, the blind beggar of Jericho, and Jesus is passing through Jericho for one more time, one final time, he has set his face like a flint to Jerusalem, knowing his appointment was his destiny from before the world began in Jerusalem, when he would bear the sin of the world. He is passing through Jericho one more time, and there's a big crowd, and a lot of noise, and there was the beggar sitting, we read, at the roadside, Bartimaeus, and he says, what's the noise about? He's got hearing, he can hear, and he's told it's Jesus of Nazareth passing by, and he had this one and one only opportunity, as I said, Jesus would not pass this way again, and he shouts to Jesus, he shouts to have mercy, and sadly, members of the crowd tell him to be quiet, be quiet, God, but this man is assaulting the kingdom of heaven with violence, and he shouts even louder, son of David, have mercy on me, and

Jesus had mercy, and he received his sight, and we read he followed him gladly, these are amazing accounts of scripture, we've had things happen in our own country, which would illustrate the same point, 1861 as an amazing revival, Dumfries, and another church building had to be put up at the south end of the high street, called South Free Church, sadly demolished in the 1990s, I think it was, but another building was required to house the worshippers in Dumfries, so many were pressing, forcing their way into the kingdom, but a very small instance, very gracious instance, similar to that, in 1991, when in this congregation, some of you will remember it, in this congregation, we had quite a few teenagers, and over a three or four month period, they all came to the Lord

[30 : 15] Jesus, well not all, but the vast majority came to the Lord Jesus. Jesus, the kingdom of heaven, Jesus said, is like a man discovering treasure in a field, and he realises all his assets to buy that field, one of the parables on that line, Jesus told, the parables to illustrate the value and the wonder of finding Jesus Christ as your saviour.

He told a similar parable illustrated with a pearl, but we won't go there. so we must ask ourselves, how is it with you, how is it with me tonight?

Have we found Christ? Are we in his kingdom? Are we under his rule? Do we desire Christ? And we must be soul-searchingly honest about ourselves.

Do we desire Christ? A long time ago, many years ago, I had to come to that question myself, did I desire him? And, as it were, I had to besiege the gates of heaven even for a desire for Christ.

Do we love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind? Does the question condemn us do we know our need for salvation?

[32 : 10] Are we convicted that we are sinners and we need to be forgiven? Do we know the realities of heaven and hell? As expressed in that parable Jesus told, the rich man awesomely knew he was in hell.

God has appointed a way of salvation and the only way is through Jesus Christ. Salvation, as we reminded this morning, is found in no one else.

There is no other name under heaven given to man by which we must be saved. The Lord Jesus died for our sins at Calvary to bring us to God.

As I said, he is that treasure in the field. He is that ultimate pearl in the parable. Do we want him? Go to him.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Four brief last comments.

[33 : 27] Are we forcing our way in? Are we refusing to go away until Christ saves us? Like that Syrophenician woman, disciples telling her to go away.

And she refused to go away. Secondly, secretly within our heart of hearts, we can have the thought, I guess I had it myself once has God chosen me.

Am I one of the elect? I think there is only one source for that thought and the source is the evil one. It is he who puts that thought in our hearts. Moses tells us plainly in Deuteronomy that the secret things don't belong to us.

The secret things belong, Moses said, to the Lord our God. The word of Christ to you and me is to come to me, all you are weary and heavy laden, I will give you rest.

[34 : 44] thirdly, perhaps we could be sleepy or even asleep, lulled into spiritual stupor because we are so consumed by things of this world, temporary attractions, things we feel we must do, we must see, giving way to our own desires, they becoming first in our lives, or listening to the devil who can persuade us that there's always tomorrow.

But we know from looking around us that there may be no tomorrow for us. The word is quite clear today, if you hear my voice, if you hear my voice, do not harden your hearts.

And lastly, just again, our text in Luke 16 is everyone forces his way into the kingdom of God.

And Jesus said something very similar another time in Luke chapter 13. He said to those listening to him, strive to enter, strive to enter through the narrow door, strive as an action verb, strive.

He could read, one translation does read, make every effort. And looking at a commentary, literally, the original Greek could encourage you to translate it, agonize to enter the narrow door.

[36 : 28] Agonize to enter through the narrow door. It's a picture of a wrestling ring, agonizing, struggling, that I must know Christ as my Lord and Saviour and not letting go.

Like Jacob, not letting go in that wrestling match that night at the Brookjabok. The door is narrow. We can't bring in other things with us, the world, it's temporary attractions.

There's a man described, a rich young man who's very earnest, came to Jesus, a young ruler, and he couldn't get through the door.

It's too narrow for him, because he had too much baggage in his life. life. What is keeping you out? We know it's not worth it.

Our eternal destiny, destiny depends on it. We know that. We know that single mindedness is the only way.

[37 : 47] That's what we saw in those illustrations in Mark's Gospel. Single minded people, they wanted Christ, and they weren't going away without Christ.

Jesus said, this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son, and believes in him, should have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

That's a sure and certain promise of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life. We must listen to him.

Everyone, that's without exception, who looks on the Son, and believes in him, shall have eternal life.

And we'll sing it in closing from Psalm 1.