

Yay or nay? Yes or no? For or against? That's the deeper question that Jesus is asking all of us today when he says in our reading for today that "from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force." The reason why that's the deeper question at work here, Christians, is because Jesus means this when he says that. The kingdom comes among you today whether you're ready for it or not. Nothing is going to stop God's kingdom from coming into the world. It's like an army invading into a nation. There's nothing we can do to stop it. So the only thing that we can ask ourselves is, are you opposed to that kingdom, or are you for it?

The Jews themselves actually understood this, and we see that in Acts chapter 5, when they're debating what they should do with the apostles who had been preaching the name of Jesus. They say, "Should we kill them? Should we punish them? Should we imprison them? What should we do?" But at that time one of their leaders, a man by the name of Gamaliel, stands up, and he says to them, "Just leave them alone! Because if this comes from men, then it's going to fail. We don't even have to do anything. We've seen that happen before. We've seen it so many times that that's just what we can expect. But if this comes from God, then nothing we do is going to stop it. We might even be found opposing God!" And he's exactly right. To be against the kingdom, to be opposing God in these things, is exactly what may happen. Because there is no neutral ground here. We can't say that we abstain. We can't say maybe. We can't say that I just didn't know. Either we are for the kingdom, or we are opposed to it. So are you for or against? Yes or no? Yay or nay?

Now, you might say, "That's a really easy question. We're here, after all. We believe in God. We've come here to worship him. Obviously, we must be on the side of God! That's a very easy question to answer." But Christians, it's quite possible to raise up a false flag. It's quite possible to say one thing and to do something else completely different. The Jews themselves show that to us. Because nobody in their time loved God more than they did. They were zealous for the traditions of their fathers. They were the ones who followed after God in everything. If anybody believed and loved God, it was the Jews, right? And they thought that everything that they did was for God. Paul himself even says that. When he was still not yet a Christian and was persecuting Christians, he believed that what he was doing was actually for God. He believed that it made God happy to see him persecute his church in that way.

But the Jews showed by their actions, Christians, that they were in fact opposed to the kingdom of God. This is what Jesus means when he says at the end of our reading: "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has 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!'" Even though they claimed to love God, their abuse of John and also throwing him into prison, their abuse of Jesus and crucifying him, and their abuse of the apostles who were proclaiming the risen Jesus, showed the truth of their hearts. They were in fact fighting against the kingdom of God, even when they claimed to be for him in everything.

And how many times do the Scriptures tell us that, Christians? Tell us this truth that when our words and our actions don't meet up together that we are in fact working against the kingdom of God? Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount that "You will know them by their fruits." You will know the truth of someone's heart by what they do, not necessarily by what they say. John the

Baptist says, "Bear fruits in keeping with repentance." If you truly belong to God, then you'll do what God wants you to do. You will have your words and your actions meet up together. And if there's something that is separating the two so that the two are different, then we are not actually following after God. Jesus himself says in a parable, "Which of the two does the will of the father? The one who says I will go, but then doesn't go? Or the one who says I won't go, but then does?" Which one has actually done what God wants them to do? Or like John says, as a final one, "If we claim to love God but hate our brother, then the love of God is not in us." If our words and our actions are not united, then we are actually fighting against the kingdom of God.

Because it's very easy, Christians, to always be talking about the people out there. The people who we believe are persecuting the church, the people who we believe are always fighting against her. We've heard the Pope this past week say some very unchristian things, and it's very easy to say, "Aha! I'm better than he is." But Christians, the one who who has his words and his actions be different from one another is actually a more dangerous thing. To claim that we are for the kingdom when we are working against it is a deadly thing in the eyes of God.

And so, do we say things like, "God is important to me. I share him on Facebook. I talk about him at church. I go to church. Obviously he must mean something to me." But then how much time do we spend with him in the week? How much time we spend in prayer? Or in the Word of God? Or we say, "Church is important to me. I know I should go. I try to go as often as I can." But then when we're here, are we just counting down the time, trying to figure out how much longer is this going to take? Because I've got stuff to do. Christians, we show the truth of our hearts by the things which we do. And are the things that we do in accordance with the will of God? Because when they aren't, even if we claim to be for God, then we are opposed to his kingdom.

But Christians, God has called us to himself. He has made us to be a new creation in him. We belong to him. And he has changed us. He has transformed us to make us something completely different, completely new. And so when we call on him as our Father, calling on him to be our Savior, calling on him to forgive us our sins, then we are walking in the kingdom of God. And when we do those good things that God has prepared for us to do from before the foundation of the world, when we do the good works he has created us to do, then we are also walking according to his will. Because that's who we are as Christians. That's who he wants us to be as Christians. And to be in the kingdom, to be for the kingdom of God, is to walk in accordance with the Spirit.

Yes, Christians you have been made new, and you belong to him. So let us come and worship him in spirit and in truth. Let us come and be in his Word and receive his gifts. Because this is who God has made us to be. And when we are in this Word, worshiping God in spirit and in truth, then God will lift us up and bring us into the kingdom of God. It's all his gift, and it is his grace alone that brings us here. And he calls us to be in that grace to his glory forever. May we say, Christians, this day with Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

To him be the glory, now and forever. Amen.