

The Gospel Unashamed

"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."

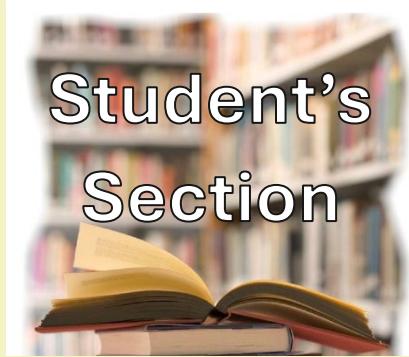
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~ All articles written by Terry Carter unless otherwise stated ~

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Terry Carter, Editor



Where Have All the Evangelists Gone—or Have We Driven Them Away?

By Dave Webster

Across our brotherhood, one cry is repeated again and again: "We just don't have any young men willing to step up and become evangelists anymore." It is spoken in elders' meetings, whispered in pews, and written plainly in church bulletins announcing yet another vacant pulpit.

But perhaps the more honest question is not where are the evangelists, but rather what kind of men are we actually asking for—and what are we willing to give in return?

In recent months, I have read job descriptions from congregations across the country. Churches large and small, rural and urban. And what I have found is troubling. Many of these descriptions do not sound like a call for a man of God, devoted to prayer and the ministry of the Word.

Instead, they read like listings for a full-time church gopher—someone to preach, yes, but also to manage, organize, counsel, visit, program, promote, attend every event, placate every critic, and somehow still produce dynamic sermons week after week.

All of this, of course, is expected—often for wages that would struggle to support a young family.

A Biblical Role Redefined by Expectations

In the New Testament, evangelists were not spiritual errand boys. Paul instructed Timothy to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Timothy 4:5), and that work was centered on preaching the Word, correcting

error, exhorting with patience, and enduring hardship.

The apostles themselves recognized the danger of being pulled away from their primary calling when they said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables" (Acts 6:2).

Yet today, many congregations expect their minister to serve every table—often while criticizing him for not studying enough or preaching deeply enough.

We say we want strong preaching, biblical courage, and doctrinal clarity. But we structure the role in such a way that study and prayer are constantly sacrificed on the altar of busyness. Then we wonder why sermons feel shallow or why burnout arrives so quickly.

We Want More—But We Offer Less

Perhaps the most uncomfortable truth is this: we expect far too much from our ministers while being unwilling to support them adequately.

Scripture could not be clearer. “The laborer deserves his wages” (**Luke 10:7**). Paul goes further, reminding the church that those who preach the gospel have a right to live by the gospel (**1 Corinthians 9:14**). Yet many congregations treat fair compensation as optional, or worse, as a necessary evil.

We would never expect a skilled tradesman, a teacher, or a business professional to work full-time for part-time pay. But somehow, when it comes to ministry, sacrifice is assumed to mean financial insecurity—not just for the preacher, but for his wife and children as well.

If a young man looks at ministry and sees instability, unrealistic expectations, constant criticism, and inadequate support, is it any wonder he hesitates?

A Crisis of Trust and Respect

There is another issue we must address: trust.

Many churches say they want a preacher to lead spiritually, yet resist him at every turn. He is expected to be bold—but not too bold. Biblical—but not uncomfortable. Convicted—but never challenging traditions or cherished opinions. When he speaks truth plainly, he is accused of being divisive. When he softens his tone, he is accused of lacking conviction.

We cannot ask men to “step up” while simultaneously tying their hands.

The Restoration Movement has always prized the authority of Scripture and the courage to stand upon it. If we truly want evangelists shaped by that heritage, we must be willing to allow them to preach the whole counsel of God—even when it unsettles us.

Rethinking the Call

The solution is not complicated, but it is costly.

Congregations must rethink what they are truly calling a man to do. Is he primarily an evangelist and preacher of the Word—or an all-purpose religious employee? Elders must guard his time, protect his focus, and encourage his growth rather than exhausting his strength.

Churches must also rethink compensation—not as charity, but as partnership in the gospel. When we invest in our ministers, we invest in the spiritual health of the congregation.

And finally, we must stop saying, “We don’t have anyone willing to step up,” and instead ask whether we have created an environment worth stepping into.

A Call to the Church

There are men who want to preach the Word in truth. There are men who love the Restoration plea, who long to proclaim Christ crucified and risen, who are willing to labor faithfully.

But they are watching. They are listening. And they are deciding whether ministry is a calling to be

embraced—or a burden to be avoided.

If we want evangelists, we must first be churches worthy of them.

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Kingdom Progress

Question: Could you please explain what Jesus meant in **Matthew 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.” **Matthew 11:12** (NKJV)

Answer:

This is admittedly a difficult passage for many reasons. Commentators are all over the place as to what Jesus meant in this passage. Translators have rendered this passage in several different ways. Some see **Luke 16:16** as a parallel passage, others would disagree with this.

“The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it.” **Luke 16:16** (NKJV)

The context is cited in support of widely different views. The Greek words in question are found rarely in the New Testament. Those words can be used in both positive and negative ways. Even the form of the verb is not certain in this passage.

Despite all these difficulties, I believe that we can unravel the meaning that Jesus intended in this passage if we do it carefully. There are various understandings that can be shown to be true. However, the question is not merely whether an understanding is true; it is whether that is what Jesus meant in this passage.

At the very start of *The Hobbit*, Bilbo says “good morning” to Gandalf. Gandalf then asks Bilbo what he means by this saying, “Do you wish me a good morning, or mean that it is a good morning whether I want it or not; or that you feel good this morning; or that it is a morning to be good on?”. Bilbo replies, “All of them at once”. This humorously and wonderfully illustrates the inherent ambiguity that can sometimes be found in human language. The question is not what “good morning” can mean, but what Bilbo intended when he said those words to Gandalf. Similarly, the question here is not what Jesus could have meant in this verse, but what He intended to communicate by the words that He spoke.

With all the questions and various opinions surrounding this passage, it is difficult to know where to begin in understanding it properly. Hopefully, the approach that I have chosen here will be helpful to most people.

Is Luke 16:16 a parallel passage?

As you can see above, both passages speak of John the Baptist, and both passages speak of the Kingdom of God (or heaven). Both verses speak of

what has been happening since John’s appearance as a prophet of God. Further, both passages contain the same Greek word, *biao*. In the Matthew passage, it is translated as “suffers violence”, but in the Luke passage it is translated “pressing” in the NKJV. Right away, we see that the same Greek word is translated very differently in these two passages by the same translators. In fact, these are the only two places where this word, *biao*, appears in the New Testament. So, there is a lot of similarity between these two verses.

However, when we look at the context for these two verses, we see that they are very different. The context in Matthew is the greatness of John as a prophet. In Luke, Jesus is warning the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, about justifying themselves before men rather than God. When considering the radically different contexts of these verses, they cannot really be considered parallel passages despite the similarity of their language. In fact, the different context is why some, like the NET translators as well as others, render the Greek word *biao* differently in Matthew than they do in Luke.

Various Translations and Paraphrases

Matthew 11:12 is translated in several different ways. Below is a sample of these variations:

“And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven **suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.**” (NKJV)

“From the time when John **appeared** until now, the kingdom of heaven **is being attacked; violent men are trying to capture it.**” (Simple English Bible)

“Ever since the appearance of John the Baptist until today God’s Kingdom **has been subjected to violence. Violent men, like the Zealots, try to seize control of it.**” (Paraphrase by Harold Fowler in his commentary on Matthew)

“From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom **is pressing forward vigorously, and vigorous men are eagerly taking possession of it.**” (William Hendrickson in his commentary on Matthew)

“And from the days of John the Baptist till now, the kingdom of heaven **is forcing its way in, and men of force take it.**” (BBE)

“From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven **has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.**” (NIV)

“From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven **has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.**” (ESV)

The ESV includes a footnote that reads, “**Or has been coming violently**”. The Simple English Version has a similar footnote.

It might seem puzzling that the same verse can be translated so differently.

The NET translates this verse very similarly to the NKJV, but they do offer a helpful note about the

translation of *biazo* which they rendered as “has suffered violence”. They suggest that it could also be rendered “is entered by force” because the Greek word can be understood as either passive or middle voice. They go on to say that in the middle voice it can be rendered as “has been coming violently”, “makes its way with (triumphant) force”, or even “to seek fervently”. Finally, they state that, “Resolution of the problem is not easy...”, and “...contextual differences point to a somewhat different meaning...in **Luke 16:16**.

Robertson's Word Pictures also admits the difficulty here and says, “...in **Matt. 11:12** the form can be either middle or passive and either makes sense, though a different sense.”

Hendrickson also points out that this Greek verb, *biazo*, can be either passive or middle voice in the form in which it appears in this verse. He takes it in the middle voice in his translation to render it, “is pressing forward vigorously”.

What this means is that the Greek itself is somewhat ambiguous. It can certainly be translated in several different ways, each of which has a different meaning.

Various ideas about the meaning here

There are too many ideas about the meaning of this verse to list and discuss here. However, the following are some of the more common ones.

1. Jesus is talking about the violence that has been perpetrated against the

Kingdom of God. He is talking about the persecution that has come to Christians throughout the history of the Church.

It is certainly true that all who live Godly lives will suffer persecution, **II Tim. 3:12**. Further, John was in prison for his faith when Jesus spoke these words. Persecution has followed the Kingdom throughout the centuries. Yet, I am not convinced that this is what Jesus meant in this verse.

2. Jesus is talking about some of the Jewish leaders in His day that were trying to take control of God's Kingdom by force. The Zealots, for example, were looking to throw off the Roman yoke of oppression by force of arms and make themselves the leaders of God's people. A similar flavor of this view points to the rejection of the message of John and Jesus by the Pharisees and Sadducees and their efforts to maintain their control of God's Kingdom even by forceful or violent means if necessary.

There is no denying that the Zealots wanted to “take the kingdom by force”. It is also true that the Pharisees and Sadducees were willing to use force to retain control over God's people. After all, they orchestrated the crucifixion of Jesus. These assertions are true, but I do not believe that is what

Jesus was addressing here.

3. Jesus is talking about the forceful men and women like the harlots and publicans who, He said, would enter the Kingdom before the chief priests and elders of Israel who did not believe John, **Matt. 21:31-32**. They were eagerly seizing the kingdom from the Jewish leaders.

Certainly, the harlots and publicans were responding to the preaching of John and Jesus while the religious leaders were resisting them. The common people recognized the hand of God while those who should have seen it were blinded by their own lust for power. Once again, we have an idea that is true, but I do not think that Jesus had this in mind.

4. Jesus is talking about how the people thronged to hear both John and Jesus. They demonstrated the zeal and fervor needed to enter and possess the Kingdom of God. As Hendrickson says, “...one cannot sleep his way into the kingdom. On the contrary, entrance into the kingdom requires earnest endeavor, untiring energy, utmost exertion.”

This is certainly a thought that will preach. There is no doubt that we need to be zealous and fervent in our pursuit of

righteousness and the Kingdom of God. We must strive to enter in by the straight and narrow gate. This is a very real and Biblical thought that Jesus certainly taught. But one more time, I doubt that Jesus had that in mind when He spoke these words.

All the above ideas are true and Biblical. They are all possible, even plausible, understandings of this statement. However, considering the context, I am not convinced that any of them are what Jesus meant here. Like Gandalf, we must strive to understand what is intended by the speaker of the words, not what they could possibly, or even plausibly, mean.

Context must decide the meaning

Since the language itself is somewhat ambiguous, the context must determine what Jesus meant in this verse. I have already noted that the NET translators rendered the Greek word, *biazo* differently in Luke than in Matthew because of the different context. They are not the only ones to do this. You can say the same for the NKJV, the Simple English Bible, the ESV, and the NASB among others. If we want to know what this verse means, we need to consider the context carefully.

At the beginning of the chapter, John was in prison, and he sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ask Him if He is the coming one or whether they should look for another. Jesus responded that

they should go and tell John what they heard and saw.

"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. 6 And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.'" Matthew 11:5-6 (NKJV)

When these disciples of John left, Jesus asked the crowd what they went to the wilderness to see.

"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? 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.'" Matthew 11:7-8 (NKJV)

Jesus then proceeded to speak to the crowd of the greatness of John as a prophet. Jesus said he was:

1. More than a prophet
2. The fulfillment of prophecy in preparing the way for Messiah
3. A greater prophet than any born of women
4. Elijah who was to come

Yet, Jesus said that the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than John. In fact, Jesus makes the case that John's ministry marked a turning point in the Kingdom of God. All the prophets and law prophesied until John. From his days, things had changed in the Kingdom. He was the fulfillment of the prophecy of

Malachi about the one coming to prepare the way for Messiah.

"Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,' Says the LORD of hosts." Malachi 3:1 (NKJV)

John was also the fulfillment of the prophecy in Malachi about Elijah coming.

"5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. 6 And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse." Malachi 4:5-6 (NKJV)

It is in the midst of Jesus speaking of John's ministry as a turning point, or new phase, for the Kingdom, that Jesus made the statement in verse 12 about the Kingdom of heaven that we have been trying to understand.

The main point that Jesus is making in the context of this verse is that, with John, a new time had begun. Prophecies were being fulfilled, the Kingdom that John said was at hand was indeed making progress, and men were eagerly working to enter it. The law and prophets had all pointed to this time in history when Messiah would come. John was the one who had prepared the way for Messiah; he was Elijah who came to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the

children to the fathers. John was the greatest prophet born of women because he had prepared the way for Christ.

But the least in the Kingdom was greater than John because they could experience citizenship in the Kingdom for which John could only prepare the way. In the words of G. Campbell Morgan, "...one five minutes of experience is worth long years of anticipation".

In short, the message of this context is the progress of the Kingdom of Heaven. The ministry of John was all about preparing the way for the King who was then speaking. This is why John was great.

"For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John." **Matthew 11:13**

The King's way had been prepared, and the King had arrived. The kingdom of heaven was pressing forward vigorously, and men were vigorously working to enter it.

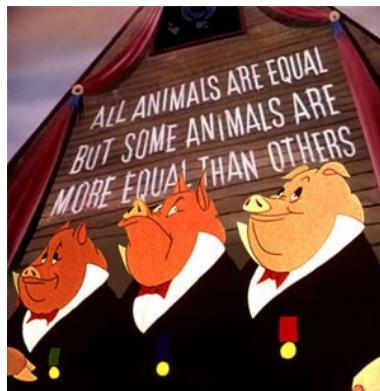
This does not mean that the Kingdom, the Church, was established by John or even in John's time, nor does it mean that the Old Testament prophets and law were no longer in force. It means that Jesus is King and His Kingdom was progressing just as the prophets and law had predicted.

Jesus emphasized this by calling upon all who had ears to hear. He then rebuked those who had not responded to the preaching of John or Jesus Himself. Despite their differing styles, some refused

to respond to the preaching of either. They thought they were wise in justifying their refusal of the message, but they could not have been more wrong.

God's Kingdom will move forward just as He intends. We can either strive vigorously to enter it, or we can strive against it. Either way, the Kingdom will press forward vigorously and triumphantly. Strive for triumph in the Lord and His Kingdom.

It's Orwellian



The term "Orwellian" refers to the writings of George Orwell, particularly his novel *1984*. What I am about to discuss fits what is found in that book as well as his book *Animal Farm*.

In *1984*, the main character, Winston Smith, lives in a world where you are constantly reminded that "Big Brother is watching you". The official language where he lives is called "newspeak" to distinguish it from the way people used to talk. Winston works at the "Ministry of Truth". His job is to go back into old records, like newspapers, and "correct" anything that no longer fits with the current narrative or would be embarrassing to those in power. The party in power has contradictory slogans like, "War is Peace", "Freedom is Slavery", and

"Ignorance is Strength". Winston is eventually tortured by a man who claims that two plus two equals five or any number you please.

In *Animal Farm*, the animals fight the humans and take over the farm. Then they post seven commandments on the barn in big white letters for all to see. The fourth commandment stated that, "No animal shall sleep in a bed", the fifth said, "No animal shall drink alcohol", the sixth read, "No animal shall kill any other animal", and the seventh stated, "All animals are equal".

After a while, one of the animal leaders wanted to sleep in a bed. When the other animals read the fourth commandment it now said, "No animal shall sleep in a bed with sheets". That is not what they remembered, but they figured that their memory was wrong. After all, that is what it said on the wall.

Later, after some animals had been executed, they read the sixth commandment which now said, "No animal shall kill any other animal without cause". They wondered how they had forgotten the last two words.

One night, there was quite a commotion that caused all the animals to come running outside of the barn. There they found a broken ladder along with a pot of white paint that had been spilled, a paintbrush, a lantern, and a stunned pig. Most of the animals had no idea what this meant. However, a few days later after reading the fifth commandment, they discovered that they had forgotten the last two words of it

too. It now said, "No animal shall drink alcohol to excess".

Towards the end of the book, they find that there is only one thing on the barn rather than seven commandments. It simply says, "All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others".

There are probably quite a number of things in the news currently or recently that come to mind when you consider the contents of these books by Orwell. Rather than go through the list of things that come to my mind, I would like to share just one thing with you that I came across recently.

Last spring, the school was given two old dictionaries. One is a 1959 edition of Webster's New International Dictionary, second edition, unabridged. It is twelve inches by nine and a half inches and stands five inches thick when closed. The other one is the 1911 edition of the Century Dictionary. It is the same length and width as the other, but it is nine and a half inches thick when closed.

I have been hearing people say that sex and gender are not the same thing. Sex, they say, is about biology, but gender is not. So, I looked up the word "gender" in each of these dictionaries and found the following:

In the 1959 dictionary, the second definition given says, "Sex, male or female". That is clear and it is worth noting that it only gives two different sexes or genders.

The 1911 dictionary was equally clear. It simply says, "Sex, male or

female". Once again, it gives only two sexes or genders.

Both older dictionaries use the words "sex" and "gender" as synonyms.

By contrast, when I look up gender on Google, I find the following:

The Oxford Language Dictionary gives the rather lengthy definition, "The male or the female sex, especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones, or one of a range of other identities that do not correspond to established ideas of male and female".

Funny how I only remembered the first six words of that definition from my school days. I had completely forgotten the last thirty-three words. Well, that must be right since it is on Google, I guess.

Google also brought up other questions that people asked. Under the question, "What is the simple definition of gender", Google shows the answer given by the World Health Organization. It is quite simple. It says, "Gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls, and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviors and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl, or boy, as well as relationships with each other."

Wow! That is so much simpler and clearer than the 1911 or 1959 versions of "Sex, male or female". I hope you are picking up on my sarcasm in the last couple of paragraphs because I have been laying it on pretty thick.

Evidently, things have been painted over while we slept. I hope we have better memories than the animals in George Orwell's book. We certainly live in an era of Newspeak where Big Brother is watching, and the Ministry of Truth is "correcting" anything from the past that no longer fits the narrative of today or is embarrassing to those in power. We are given contradictory slogans like "Men can be Women", "Men can have Babies", Sex is not Gender", and others too vile to be printed here.

It is Orwellian, and we are being treated like dumb animals. Ignorance is not strength except for those who would oppress us with sinful rebellion towards both God and nature. Do not be fooled, let God be true and every man a liar. Two plus two does not equal five, or any other number except four no matter how much they torture us with their propaganda and political pressure.

"20 Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! 21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, And prudent in their own sight!" Isaiah 5:20-21 (NKJV)

Big Brother may be watching, but we serve a God who is the biggest of all, and He is watching.

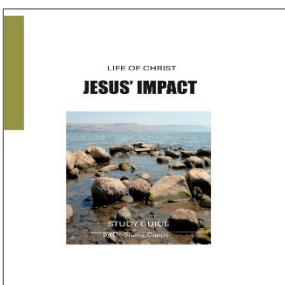
Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

"...Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil."



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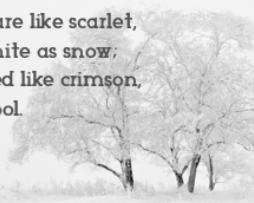
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**Come now, and let us reason together,*
Says the LORD,*

**Though your sins are like scarlet,
They shall be as white as snow;
Though they are red like crimson,
They shall be as wool.*

Isaiah 1:18



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