

January 4, 2015 – To the chosen people found at Westboro Baptist Church:

Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee: And I will . . . bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing. (Genesis 12:1-2).

The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee. (And) he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child. (Acts 7:2, 3, 5).

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. (Hebrews 11:8-10).

I'm pressing on the upward way,
New heights I'm gaining every day;
Still praying as I'm onward bound,
"Lord, plant my feet on higher ground."

(Johnson Oatman, Jr. - 1898)

Mr. Oatman likely had Luke 16:16 in mind when he wrote that verse from the popular hymn "Higher Ground."

"The law and the prophets were until John; since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it." (Luke 16:16).

In this verse two things may be noted:

First, the **work** and **office** of John the Baptist, specifically, preaching the kingdom of God to prepare the way for its introduction to succeed the law and the prophets. The “law and the prophets” is the Old Testament. These are said to be until John. He first began to introduce the New Testament dispensation, or gospel-state of the church; which, with its glorious, spiritual, and eternal privileges and blessings, is often called the kingdom of heaven, or kingdom of God. John the Baptist preached that the kingdom of God was at hand.

So also Christ preached, see Matthew 4:17: "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." So too the disciples were directed to preach, see Matthew 10:7: "And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand." It was not John the Baptist, but Christ, that fully brought in, and actually established, this kingdom of God; but John the Baptist, as Christ's forerunner to prepare his way before him, did the first thing that was done towards introducing it. The old dispensation was abolished, and the new brought in by degrees; as the night gradually ceases, and gives place to the increasing day which succeeds in its place.

First the day-star arises; next follows the light of the sun itself, but dimly reflected, in the dawning of the day; but this light increases, and shines more and more, and the stars that served for light during the foregoing night gradually go out and their light ceases, as being now needless, till the sun rises and enlightens the world by his own direct light, which increases as he ascends higher above the horizon, till the day-star itself gradually disappears; all of which is agreeable to what John says of himself at John 3:30: "He must increase, but I must decrease."

John was the forerunner of Christ and harbinger of the gospel-day; much as the morning-star is the forerunner of the sun. John had the most honorable office of any of the prophets; the other prophets foretold Christ to come, but John revealed him as already come, and had the honour to be that servant who should come immediately before him and actually introduce him, and even to be the instrument concerned in his solemn inauguration, as he was in baptizing him. John the Baptist was the greatest of the prophets that came before Christ, as the morning-star is the brightest of all the stars, as we see in Matthew 11:11 ("Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: . . .").

Secondly, we may observe **his success** in that since John began his ministry, “every man” pressed into that kingdom of God which he preached. The greatness of his success appeared in two things:

1. In the generalness of it: “every man.” Here is a term of universality; but it is not to be taken as universal with regard to individuals, but kinds. When John preached, there was an extraordinary pouring out of the Spirit of God that attended his preaching. An uncommon awakening, and concern for salvation, appeared on the minds of all sorts of persons; and even in the most unlikely persons, and those from whom such a thing might least be expected. For example, the publicans, who were some of the most infamous sort of men, came to him inquiring what they should do to be saved. And the soldiers, who were doubtless a very profane, loose, and profligate sort of persons (think this country’s military), made the same inquiry, see Luke 3:12, and 14: "Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? ***And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do?"

2. His success also appeared in the manner in which his hearers sought the kingdom of God; they pressed into it. It is elsewhere set forth by their being violent for the kingdom of heaven and taking it by force. So we see at Matthew 11:12: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force."

The Doctrine we can glean from these words is this- "It concerns every one that would obtain the kingdom of God, to be pressing into it."

Now, what is meant by the concept of “pressing into it?”

1. This expression denotes **strength of desire**. Men in general desire the kingdom of God; that is, they desire to go to heaven rather than to hell. But most of them are not overly concerned about it; but to the contrary, live a secure and careless life. And some others, being under some degrees of the awakenings of God's Spirit, are not pressing into the kingdom of God. But they that may be said to be truly “pressing” have strong desires to get out of a natural condition and to get an interest in Christ. They have such a conviction of the misery of their present state and of the extreme necessity of obtaining a better state, that their minds are possessed with and wrapped up in concern about it.

To obtain salvation is desired by them above all things in the world. This concern is so great that it very much shuts out other concerns.

2. Pressing into the kingdom of heaven denotes **earnestness and firmness of resolution**. The firmness of the resolution lies in the fullness of the disposition of the heart to do what is resolved to be done. Those who are pressing into the kingdom of God have a disposition of heart to do everything that is required and that lies in their power to do, and to continue in it. They have not only earnestness but steadiness of resolution: they do not seek with a wavering unsteady heart, by turns or fits, being off and on; but it is the constant bent of the soul, if possible, to obtain the kingdom of God. It's this concept: "[H]e hath as it were the strength of an unicorn." (Numbers 23:22).

3. By pressing into the kingdom of God is signified **greatness of endeavor**. It is as expressed in Ecclesiastes 9:10: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; . . ." And this is the natural and necessary consequence of the two aforementioned things. Where there is strength of desire and firmness of resolution, there will be answerable or resultant endeavors. Persons thus engaged in their hearts will "strive to enter in at the strait gate," and will be violent for heaven; their practice of daily life will be agreeable to the counsel of the wise man at the beginning of Proverbs 2, "My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." (Proverbs 2:1-5). All of those actions identified in those verses constitute great endeavors.

4. Pressing into the kingdom of God denotes an **engagedness** that is directly about that business of getting into the kingdom of God. Persons may be in very great exercise and distress of mind about the condition of their souls; their thoughts and cares may be greatly engaged and taken up about things of a spiritual nature -- and yet not be pressing into the kingdom of God, nor towards it. They distress their minds with fears that they be not elected, or that they have committed the unpardonable sin, or that God has given them up to judicial and final hardness, and never intends to show them mercy. Or they entangle themselves about the doctrine of original sin and other mysterious doctrines of religion that are above their comprehension.

Such persons that seem to be in great distress about a future eternal state get much into a way of perplexing themselves with such things as these or others. But they cannot be said to be pressing towards the kingdom of God: because their exercise is not in that work, but rather that which tends to hinder them in that work. In other words, don't get sidetracked!

The apostle tells us at I Corinthians 9:26 that he did not fight as those that “beateth the air.” Our time is short enough; we should not spend it on that which is nothing of benefit to the purpose. There are real difficulties and enemies enough for persons to encounter and to employ all their strength; don’t fight phantoms.

5. By pressing into the kingdom of God is denoted a **breaking through opposition and difficulties**. There is in the expression a plain intimation of difficulty. If there were no opposition, but the way was all clear and open, there would be no need of pressing to get along. They therefore that are pressing into the kingdom of God go on with such engagedness and focus that they break through the difficulties that are in the way. They are so set for salvation that those things by which others are discouraged, and stopped, and turned back, do not stop them, but they press through them. Thus the apostle says at Philippians 3:11: "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." He tells us there in the context what difficulties he broke through, that he suffered the loss of all things, “and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.” (Philippians 3:8).

He that is pressing into the kingdom of God commonly finds many things in the way that are against the grain; but he is not stopped by the cross that lies before him, but takes it up, and carries it. Everything that is found to be a weight that hinders him in running this race he casts from him.

Now, let’s look at **why the kingdom of heaven should be sought in this manner**. It should be thus sought (by pressing),

1. On account of the **extreme necessity** we are in of getting into the kingdom of heaven. We are in a perishing necessity of it; without it we are utterly and eternally lost. Out of the kingdom of God is no safety; there is no other hiding-place; this is the only city of refuge, in which we can be secure from the avenger that pursues all the ungodly. The vengeance of God will pursue, overtake and eternally destroy them that are not in this kingdom.

2. On account of the **shortness and uncertainty of the opportunity** for getting into this kingdom. When a few days are past, all our opportunity for it will be gone. Our day is limited. God has set our bounds and we know not where. We don’t know how soon we shall get past that line, beyond which there is no work, device, knowledge, nor wisdom; and therefore we should do what we have to do with our might (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

3. On account of the **difficulty** of getting into the kingdom of God. There are innumerable difficulties in the way; such as few conquer: most of them that try have not the resolution, courage, earnestness, and constancy enough; but they fail, give up, and perish. The difficulties are too many and too great for them that do not violently press forward. Matthew 7:14: "Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Luke 13:24: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

4. The **possibility of obtaining**. Though it be attended with so much difficulty, yet it is not a thing impossible. Acts 8:22: "[I]f perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." II Timothy 2:25: "[I]f God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth."

5. It is altogether proper that the kingdom of heaven should be thus sought, because of the great **excellency** of it. We are willing to seek earthly things, of trifling value, with great diligence, and through much difficulty; it therefore certainly becomes us to seek that with great earnestness which is of infinitely greater worth and excellence.

6. Such a manner of seeking is **needful to prepare persons** for the kingdom of God. Such earnestness and thoroughness of endeavors is the ordinary means that God makes use of to bring persons to an acquaintance with themselves, to a sight of their own hearts, to a sense of their own helplessness, and to a despair in their own strength and righteousness. And such engagedness and constancy in seeking the kingdom of heaven prepare the soul to receive it the more joyfully and thankfully, and the more highly to prize and value it when obtained.

I love you!