

# Heaven Taken by Storm



*Rev.<sup>d</sup> Thomas Watson*

*Engraved by J. Freeman from a print accompanying early edition of his Works*

# Heaven Taken by Storm

Showing the Holy Violence a Christian Is to  
Put Forth in the Pursuit after Glory

Thomas Watson

Edited by Joel R. Beeke



Soli Deo Gloria Publications  
*. . . for instruction in righteousness . . .*

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**Soli Deo Gloria Publications**

An imprint of Reformation Heritage Books  
3070 29th St. SE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49512  
616-977-0889  
orders@heritagebooks.org  
www.heritagebooks.org

First paperback reprint 2019

*Printed in the United States of America*  
22 23 24 25 26 27/10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

ISBN 978-1-60178-672-2

This volume is edited from *The Christian Soldier, or, Heaven Taken by Storm* (New York: Robert Moore, 1810).

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## Preface to the First American Edition

At a period when so many appear to be influenced by a strong desire to seek the way to Zion, it will no doubt be acceptable to those who have their faces turned thither, to have in their hands and before their eyes the writings of so eminently pious a minister of the gospel as was the Reverend Thomas Watson.

Whoever is conversant with the testimony contained in the sacred Scriptures, which among Protestants is universally allowed to be the only true standard of our faith and manners, must acknowledge that the life of a Christian is a life of warfare. Thus we find it recorded, "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" (Matt. 24:42), and, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:3). Yet there are none who do not readily acknowledge that the opposition raised by the world in our days is not equal to that experienced by our primitive brethren. Yet we have the equal promise, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. 6:34), and again, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). Notwithstanding these precious promises, it is greatly to be feared that although there are many and faithful ministers of God's Word in these our days, yet if the open avowal of our faith should subject us to the scaffold or the stake, there are few, alas! too few, who would equal an Almondus, Apprice, Ardley, Arethusius, Rodgers, or James Askew. Still we would venture to assert that both the life and the writings of the author are not in point of excellence a whit short of any of theirs.

Although in the opinion of some careless readers, there may at first appear nothing in the style of the following work to engage the attention of the great or the learned of the world, yet upon a serious perusal of the great and awful subject of which it treats, there will be found a language supported by such strong and irresistible

truth as is capable of making even a Felix tremble, and which those called the men of the world can neither gainsay nor withstand.

In this little work it is readily confessed that there are some expressions which may be construed to manifest a particular enmity to a certain sect. If any should think so, let them remember the words of the apostles, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Like the apostles, our author's care seems to have been to set the fear of his Creator constantly before him. In what he delivered from the pulpit or issued from the press, he seemed to be much more anxious to gain over souls to the kingdom of heaven by the promulgation of serious and important truths than to tickle his readers and hearers by the delicate and fashionable mode now in use, which is called elegant composition and highly finished sentences. He was a zealous and faithful servant of his Lord; and in the performance of the sacred duties enjoined upon him by virtue of his office, he cared little or nothing about what men might do unto him or say concerning him.

In the present edition of this work alterations have been made in the orthography of the author, so as to suit it to that used in the present day. Some expressions, which were obsolete, have likewise been modernized, but the utmost care has been taken that no expression should lose any part of its energy, strength, or meaning. The marginal notes in the old edition, which were principally in the Greek and Latin languages, have been omitted in this. The propriety of this retrenchment must be self-evident because they tended rather to embarrass than instruct the great bulk of those into whose hands this little work might fall, while at the same time they greatly enhanced the price.

The publisher, well apprized of the value of the tract which he now offers, has been anxious to render it as least costly as possible. He sincerely hopes that it may be the happy means of converting some from the miserable ways of sin and death to the paths of righteousness and everlasting life.

That this may be the happy lot of all into whose hands this may come, is the sincere wish of

THE PUBLISHER

NEW YORK, MARCH 26, 1810.



## Preface to the Present Edition

Thomas Watson was a highly esteemed, seventeenth-century, nonconformist Puritan preacher and author. He earned a Master of Arts degree from Emmanuel College, Cambridge, where he was known for "hard study." Upon completion of his studies in 1646, he commenced a sixteen-year pastorate at St. Stephen's, Walbrook, London, interrupted by a few months of imprisonment in 1651 for his part in a plot to reestablish the monarchy. Watson gained renown as a godly preacher particularly gifted in extemporaneous prayer. When the Act of Uniformity in 1662 destroyed most of the London churches, Watson was one of many Puritan divines to open a private meeting place. After the Declaration of Indulgence in 1672, he obtained a license for Crosby Hall where he preached for several years until he retired to Essex. He died in 1686 suddenly while praying in secret.

The writings of Thomas Watson, replete with sound doctrine, practical wisdom, and heart-searching application, need no introduction to readers of the Puritans. His profound spirituality, terse style, gripping remarks, practical illustrations, and beauty of expression make him one of the most irresistible, quotable, and devotional of all the Puritans. Recent decades have seen repeated reprints by Banner of Truth Trust in particular of Watson's three-volume work of 176 sermons on the Westminster Shorter Catechism (*A Body of Divinity; The Ten Commandments; The Lord's Prayer*); of his classic on Matthew 5:1-12, *The Beatitudes*; of his *Doctrine of Repentance*; and of his *A Divine Cordial* [more recent title, *All Things for Good*], a most comforting exposition of Romans 8:28 for the afflicted Christian. Soli Deo Gloria is to be commended for a recent printing of a hefty 740-page volume of Watson's miscellaneous sermons which combines two volumes (*The Beatitudes* excepted) printed in 1829 as *Discourses on Important and Interesting Subjects: Being the Select Works of the Rev. Thomas Watson*. His *Art of Divine Contentment* has recently been reprinted by Free Presbyterian Publications.

It is astonishing that despite all the excellent reprints of Puritan writings in the last thirty years, no effort has been made to bring into circulation Thomas Watson's scarce and precious little volume

of practical Christian living, *Heaven Taken by Storm*. First printed in London, 1669 for Thomas Parkhurst, a second and better edition was edited by Rev. R. Armstrong, a London pastor who highly prized Watson. In 1810 a New York publisher printed Armstrong's edition for the first time in America, entitling it, *The Christian Soldier; Or, Heaven Taken by Storm*. In this present edition, which is based on the 1810 American printing, we revert back to the original title.

In preparing *Heaven Taken by Storm* for the printer, I have aimed in every instance to follow the same guidelines noted in the preface to the first American edition (cf. above). No substantive or doctrinal alterations have been made. Since this book is of a practical nature, however, I have departed from my naturally purist conceptions which do not allow for any alteration of the manuscript: obsolete words have been updated; punctuation and spelling have been modernized; chapter divisions and English renderings of Latin phrases have been supplied for the first time.

Two of Watson's scarce sermons are attached as appendices. The first, "The Happiness of Drawing Near to God," based on Psalm 73:28, was appended to the presently reprinted edition. The second, "How We May Read the Scriptures with Most Spiritual Profit" (Deut. 17:19) is taken from *The Bible and the Closet*, edited by John Overton Choules (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1844). Both sermons effectively augment themes Watson has touched on in *Heaven Taken by Storm*.

My heartfelt thanks in the readying of this work for print is extended to Mrs. Laurena Quist as proofreader, Mary de Jonge as typist, Gary and Linda den Hollander as typesetters, Dr. Michael Bell as translator, and Don Kistler as publisher. For financial assistance on behalf of the Netherlands Reformed Book and Publishing Committee, we are indebted to a generous donor who wishes to retain his anonymity.

Finally, it is interesting to note that Dr. Doddridge relates that this little volume was used for the conversion of the renowned Colonel Gardiner. It is our sincere wish that God may bless this timeless treasure to many also in our needy day to their eternal salvation and that true believers, under the tutelage of the Spirit, may learn more fully the sacred art of offering holy violence to the kingdom of heaven.

*Soli Deo gloria!*

— JOEL R. BEEKE

# 1

## Taking the Kingdom of Heaven by Holy Violence

---

*"The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the  
violent take it by force"* (Matt. 11:12).

John the Baptist, hearing in prison of the fame of Christ, sends two of his disciples to Him with this question, "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" (Matt. 11:3). Not (as Tertullian thinks) that John the Baptist knew not that Jesus Christ was the true Messiah, for he was confirmed in this both by the Spirit of God and by a sign from heaven (John 1:33). But John the Baptist hereby endeavored to correct the ignorance of his own disciples who had a greater respect for him than for Christ.

In the fourth verse Christ answers their question, "Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed," etc. Jesus Christ demonstrates Himself to be the true Messiah by His miracles which were real and ocular proofs of His divinity. John's disciples being departed, Christ falls into a high praise and commendation of John the Baptist, "What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?" (Matt. 11:7). As if Christ had said, John the Baptist was no unconstant man, fluctuating in his mind and being shaken as a reed from one opinion to another; he was no Reuben, unstable as water, but was fixed and resolute in religion, and a prison could make no alteration in him. "But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment?" (Matt. 11:8). John did not indulge his senses; he wore not silks,

but camel's hair; nor did he affect to live at court, but in a wilderness (Matt. 3:3, 4).

Again, Christ commends John as being His forerunner who prepared the way before Him (Matt. 11:10). He was the morning star which did precede the Sun of Righteousness; and that Christ might sufficiently honor this holy man, He does not only parallel him with, but prefers him before, the chief of the prophets. "What went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet" (Matt. 11:9). "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist" (Matt. 11:11). He was eminent both for dignity of office and perspicuity of doctrine; and so our text is ushered in, "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."

In these words there is, first, the preface or introduction: "from the days of John the Baptist until now." John the Baptist was a zealous preacher, a Boanerges, or son of Thunder; and after his preaching, people began to be awakened out of their sins.

Hence learn what kind of ministry is likely to do most good, namely, that which works upon the consciences of men. John the Baptist lifted up his voice like a trumpet; he preached the doctrine of repentance with power: "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). He came hewing and cutting down men's sins, and afterwards preached Christ to them. First, he poured in the vinegar of the law, then the wine of the gospel. This was that preaching which made men studiously seek after heaven. John did not so much preach to please as to profit; he chose rather to discover men's sins than to show his own eloquence. The best mirror is not that which is most gilded, but that which shows the truest face. That preaching is to be preferred which makes the truest discovery of men's sins and shows them their hearts. John the Baptist was a burning and shining light; he did burn in his doctrine and shine in his life; and therefore men pressed into heaven. Peter, who was filled with a spirit of zeal, humbled his hearers for their sins and opened to them a fountain in Christ's blood. "They were pricked in their heart" (Acts 2:37). It is the greatest mercy to have a soul-searching ministry. If one had a desperate wound, he would desire to have it searched to the bottom.

Who would not be content to have their souls searched so they may have them saved?

Secondly, there is the matter in the text, "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."

*What is meant by the kingdom of heaven?* Some interpret it as the doctrine of the gospel which reveals Christ and heaven. So Erasmus taught. But I rather, by the kingdom of heaven, understand glory; so taught Beza and others.

This kingdom suffereth violence. It is a metaphor from a town or castle that holds out in war and is not taken but by storm. So the kingdom of heaven will not be taken without violence. "The violent take it by force." The earth is inherited by the *meek* (Matt. 5:5). Heaven is inherited by the *violent*. Our life is military. Christ is our Captain, the gospel is the banner, the graces are our spiritual artillery, and heaven is only taken in a forcible way. These words fall into two parts:

1. the combat: "suffereth violence,"
2. the conquest: "the violent take it by force."

The right way to take heaven is by storm; or thus, none get into heaven but violent ones. This violence has a double aspect.

First, it concerns men as magistrates; they must be violent:

*In punishing the guilty.* When Aaron's Urim and Thummim will do no good, then must Moses come with his rod. The wicked are the bad people and surfeit of the commonwealth which, by the care of magistracy, are to be purged out. God has placed governors for the terror of evildoers (1 Pet. 2:14). They must not be like the swordfish which has a sword in his head but is without a heart. They must not have a sword in their hand, but no heart to draw it out for the cutting down of impiety. Connivance in a magistrate supports vice, and by not punishing offenders he adopts other men's faults and makes them his own. Magistracy without zeal is like the body without spirit. Too much leniency emboldens sin and doth but shave the head which deserves to be cut off.

*In defending the innocent.* The magistrate is the asylum or altar of refuge for the oppressed to fly to. Charles, Duke of Calabria, was so in love with doing justice that he caused a bell to be hung at his palace gate, and whosoever would ring it, was sure presently to be admitted into the duke's presence,



or have some officers sent out to hear his cause. Aristides was famous for his justice, of whom the historian saith that he would never favor any man's cause because he was his friend nor do injustice to any because he was his enemy. The magistrate's balance is the oppressed man's shield.

Secondly, this violence concerns men as Christians. Though heaven be given us freely, yet we must contend for it, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" (Eccl. 9:10). Our work is great, our time short, our Master urgent. We have need therefore to summon together all the powers of our souls and strive as in a matter of life and death, that we may arrive at the kingdom above. We must not only put forth diligence, but violence. For the illustrating and clearing of this proposition, I shall show what violence is *not meant* here.

This violence in the text excludes, in the first place, an ignorant violence, to be violent for that which we do not understand — "As I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD" (Acts 17:23). These Athenians were violent in their devotions, but it might be said to them, as Christ said to the woman of Samaria, "Ye worship ye know not what" (John 4:22). Thus the Catholics are violent in their religion. Witness their penance, fasting, cutting themselves till the blood comes. But it is a zeal without knowledge; their metal is better than their eyesight. When Aaron was to burn incense upon the altar, he was first to light the lamps (Exod. 30:7). When zeal like incense burns, first the lamp of knowledge must be lighted.

Secondly, it excludes a bloody violence, which is twofold: (1) when one goes to lay violent hands upon *himself*. The body is an earthly prison where God has put the soul. We must not break prison, but stay till God by death lets us out. The sentinel is not to stir without permission from his captain; nor must we dare to stir hence without God's permission. Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 6:19). When we offer violence to them, we destroy God's temple. The lamp of life must burn so long as any natural moisture is left, like oil, to feed it. (2) It excludes a bloody violence when one takes away the life of *another*. There's too much of this violence nowadays. No sin has a louder voice than blood: "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground" (Gen.

4:10). If there is a curse for him that "smiteth his neighbour secretly" (Deut. 27:24), then he is doubly cursed who kills him. If a man had slain another unawares, he might take sanctuary and fly to the altar, but if he had done it willingly, the holiness of the place was not to protect him. "If a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile; thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die" (Exod. 21:14). Joab, being a man of blood, King Solomon sought to slay him even though he caught hold on the horns of the altar. Formerly, in Bohemia, a murderer was to be beheaded and put in the same coffin with him whom he had killed. Thus we see what violence the text excludes.

What violence is meant here — it is a *holy violence*. This is twofold. First, we must be violent for the truth. Here Pilate's question will be cited, "What is truth?" Truth is either the blessed Word of God which is called *the Word of truth*, or those doctrines which are deduced from the Word, and agree with it as the dial with the sun or the transcript with the original; as the doctrine of the trinity, the doctrine of the creation, the doctrine of free grace, justification by the blood of Christ, regeneration, resurrection of the dead, and the life of glory. These truths we must be violent for, which is either by being advocates for them or martyrs.

Truth is the most glorious thing! The least filing of this gold is precious. What shall we be violent for, if not for truth? Truth is ancient; its grey hairs may make it venerable; it comes from Him who is the ancient of days. Truth is unerring; it is the star which leads to Christ. Truth is pure (Ps. 119:140). It is compared to silver refined seven times (Ps. 12:6). There is not the least spot on truth's face; it breathes nothing but sanctity. Truth is triumphant; it is like a great conqueror when all his enemies lie dead; it keeps the field and sets up its trophies of victory. Truth may be opposed but never quite deposed. In the time of Dioclesian things seemed desperate and truth ran low. Soon after was the golden time of Constantine, and then truth did again lift up its head. When the water in the Thames is lowest, a high tide is ready to come in. God is on truth's side and so long as there is no fear it will prevail, "The heavens being on fire shall be dissolved" (2 Pet. 3:12), but not that truth which came from heaven (1 Pet. 1:25).

Truth has noble effects. Truth is the *seed of the new birth*. God does not regenerate us by miracles or revelations, but by the word of truth (James 1:18). As truth is the breeder of grace, so it is the feeder of it (1 Tim. 4:6). Truth *sanctifies*: "Sanctify them through Thy truth" (John 17:17). Truth is the seal that leaves the print of its own holiness upon us; it is both *speculum* and *lavacrum*, a glass to show us our blemishes and a laver to wash them away. Truth *makes us free* (John 8:32). It bears off the fetters of sin and puts us into a state of sonship (Rom. 8:11), and kingship (Rev. 1:6). Truth is *comforting*; this wine cheers. When David's harp and viol could yield him no comfort, truth did: "This is my comfort in my affliction: for Thy Word hath quickened me" (Ps. 119:50). Truth is an *antidote against error*. Error is the adultery of the mind; it stains the soul as treason stains blood. Error damns as well as does vice. A man may as well die by poison as by pistol; and what can stave off error but truth? The reason so many have been tricked into error is because they either did not know, or did not love, the truth. I can never say enough in the honor of truth. Truth is *basis fidei*, the ground of our faith; it gives us an exact model of religion; it shows us what we are to believe. Take away truth and our faith is fancy. Truth is the *best flower in the church's crown*; we have not a richer jewel to trust God with than our souls, nor He a richer jewel to trust us with than His truths. Truth is *insigne honoris*, an ensign of honor; it distinguishes us from the false church, as chastity distinguisheth a virtuous woman from an harlot. In short, truth is *ecclesiae praesidium*, that is, the bulwark of a church and a nation. It is said, the Levites (who were the *antesignani*, that is, the ensign-bearers of truth) strengthened the kingdom (2 Chron. 11:17). Truth may be compared to the capitol of Rome, which was a place of the greatest strength; or the tower of David, on which there hang a thousand shields (Cant. 4:4). Our forts and navies do not so much strengthen us as truth. Truth is the best militia of a kingdom; if once we part with truth and espouse popery, the lock is cut where our strength lies. What then should we be violent for, if not for truth? We are bid to contend as in an agony "for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). If truth once be gone, we may write this epitaph on England's tombstone: "The glory is departed."



This holy violence is also when we are violent for our own salvation, "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:10). The Greek word signifies *anxious carefulness*, or a serious bearing of one's thoughts about the business of eternity, such a care as sets head and heart at work. In this channel of religion all a Christian's zeal should run.

The third thing is: What is implied in this holy violence? It implies three things:

1. resolution of will,
2. vigor of affection, and
3. strength of endeavor.

*Resolution of the will.* "I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep Thy righteous judgments" (Ps. 119:106). Whatever is in the way to heaven — though there be a lion in the way — I will encounter it like a resolute commander that charges through the whole body of the army. The Christian is resolved; come what will, he will have heaven. Where there is this resolution, danger must be despised, difficulties trampled upon, terrors contemned. This is the first thing in holy violence: resolution of will; I will have heaven whatever it costs me, and this resolution must be in the strength of Christ.

Resolution is like the bias to the bowl, which carries it strongly. Where there is but half a resolution — a will to be saved and a will to follow sin — it is impossible to be violent for heaven. If a traveller be unresolved, sometimes he will ride this way, sometimes that; he is violent for neither.

*Vigor of the affections.* The will proceeds upon *reason*; the judgment being informed of the excellency of a state of glory and the will being resolved upon a voyage to that holy land, now the affections follow and they are on fire in passionate longings after heaven. The affections are violent things, "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God" (Ps. 42:2). The rabbis note here, that David saith not, "My soul hungereth," but "thirsteth," because naturally we are more impatient with thirst than hunger. See in what a rapid, violent motion David's affections were carried after God. Affections are like the wings of the bird which make the soul swift in its flight after glory; where the affections are stirred up, there is offering violence to heaven.

This violence implies *strength of endeavor*, when we strive

for salvation as though a matter of life and death. It is easy to talk of heaven, but not to get to heaven; we must *operam navare*, put forth all our strength, and call in the help of heaven to this work.

The fourth thing is, how many ways a Christian must offer violence, namely, four ways; he must offer violence:

1. to himself,
2. to Satan,
3. to the world, and
4. to heaven.