

## The Reed not Thrown Away Matthew 12:15-21

We continue again this morning in the Gospel of Matthew where we have been seeing the King and His Kingdom. We have been working our way through the gospel and have recently been seeing the growing opposition of Jesus by the Pharisees. We ended last week with”

*Matthew 12:14 (ESV)*

*14 But the Pharisees went out and **conspired against him, how to destroy him.***

The focus of the Pharisees was not on leading Israel, it was not on teaching Israel, it was on destroying Jesus. Jesus was moving throughout Israel offering the Kingdom to them and performing miracles that would be seen as Messianic miracles, as prophesied by the Old Testament Prophets. But He was not the Messiah they wanted. They were in control of the people but Jesus as Messiah would remove power from them, and they did not want that. The Pharisees were building their efforts to destroy Jesus, which is where we pick up Matthew’s account.

### God's Chosen Servant (12:15-21)

*Matthew 12:15 (ESV)*

*15 Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all*

Jesus was aware of the efforts of the Pharisees so Jesus moved away from the Pharisees. We do not have specific information where Jesus was or where He went to be it does not appear to be so far that people of the Galilee region could not follow Him.

The people still followed Him and Jesus continued to heal them. There was a growing following of Jesus, which caused the Pharisees to work more and more against Jesus. But Jesus was not going to abandon those who followed Him, even if they were following Him for physical and not spiritual reasons.

*Matthew 12:16–17 (ESV)*

*16 and ordered them not to make him known.*

*17 This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah:*

This verse causes many to be very confused. We have seen this before here in Matthew, and each time it causes confusion for people. Jesus performs miracles and then tells the people, that in this case, He healed, to not make the fact that He had healed them.

We often understand that Jesus used miracles to validate or authenticate who He was. So why would Jesus not want the people He healed to tell anyone? I think the answer to this lies in the timing God had prescribed for Jesus death. It was still future for Jesus, and Jesus still had much to do before His death would come. Jesus was not running from conflict, He simply was avoiding unnecessary conflict. He would later poke the Pharisees

when greater conflict was needed. But it was not needed then and so Jesus told them to not make it known what He had done for them.

So what was spoken by the Prophet Isaiah?

*Matthew 12:18–21 (ESV)*

18     *“Behold, my servant whom I have  
chosen,  
my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased.  
I will put my Spirit upon him,  
and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.  
19     He will not quarrel or cry aloud,  
nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets;  
20     a bruised reed he will not break,  
and a smoldering wick he will not quench,  
until he brings justice to victory;  
21     and in his name the Gentiles will  
hope.”*

There is so much here in this quotation from Isaiah 42:1-3. Let's read the Original verses from Isaiah and then go back and work through Matthew's quotation of it.

*Isaiah 42:1–3 (ESV)*

*The LORD's Chosen Servant*

*42 Behold my servant, whom I uphold,*

*my chosen, in whom my soul delights;*

*I have put my Spirit upon him;*

*he will bring forth justice to the nations.*

*2 He will not cry aloud or lift up his  
voice,*

*or make it heard in the street;*

*3 a bruised reed he will not break,  
and a faintly burning wick he will not quench;  
he will faithfully bring forth justice.*

Matthew, led by the Holy Spirit, chose to quote from Isaiah here to firmly communicate that Jesus is the Messiah that Israel was waiting for and that had been promised in the Old Testament. Remember that Israel had been completely changed by the captivity in Babylon and then the 400 silent years from Malichi until John the Baptizer. Because in Babylon they had lost access to the temple and the sacrificial system. It was during this time that the Pharisees began and had pushed the people to strict adherence to the law. The law had become so important that the lawgiver was almost an afterthought. It was also during this time

that Israel continued in being an occupied people their focus on the Messiah was not entirely as the Old Testament prophets had taught. The hope for the future Messiah was for a military leader that would bring back to Israel what Israel had under David and Solomon a great military dynasty not subjected to any other power. It was more than 600 years for Judah and Jerusalem, and more than 700 years for the rest of Israel to be occupied and subject to foreign powers. The hope of the Messiah was freedom from that subjection.

So Matthew here is building a discourse to show who the Messiah really was and what His mission was. As Matthew applied this Old Testament test to Jesus it was groundbreaking and fundamental in a proper understanding of who the Messiah is and what He will do. So, let's go back through the text in Matthew:

*Matthew 12:18 (ESV)*

*18 "Behold, my servant whom I have chosen,*

*my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased.*

*I will put my Spirit upon him,*

*and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.*

First, we see that the Messiah was chosen by God, not someone who ascended through His own power to the position. Not only

was He chosen for the mission by God but He is beloved by God.

The word Servant in the first line is the Greek word παῖς (pais). This is an interesting word. Most of the time, just over 50% it is translated as servant. The rest of the time it is translated making reference to being a child, son, a youth, or a boy, but all with a reference to being my son, my boy, etc. As I looked at this here in Matthew and then in the Hebrew in Isaiah I was fascinated. In Hebrew the word is “Eved” and also has a range of meanings. Most often it is translated simply as servant or slave. In the more minor translations it also has the idea of a family relationship particularly a male in the royal family. It is not the normal word used for servant or slave either in Hebrew or Greek. Isaiah chose a word that would emphasize the royal relationship of the Messiah to the one who chose Him.

The Messiah was a chosen member of the Royal family in close relationship to the one who chose Him, Jehovah God. Isaiah and Matthew made the case in the beginning of this verse that Jesus was chosen by the Father, Jehovah God, to be both His servant in this mission but also His beloved child. This emphasizes the heart of God in calling us, sending His beloved Son to sacrifice for us. This is a great sacrifice we have difficulty understanding.

God also said that He would put His Spirit on Him. This is another phrase that causes some confusion. Since Jesus is God why would He need the Holy Spirit? That is a great question and

reflects the complexity of Jesus' mission. Yes, Jesus was 100% God and 100% human. As 100% God He has all the attributes of God and as God would not need the power of the Holy Spirit because He already has that power. We know from the Apostle Paul in the book of Philippians that when Jesus was born He set aside the use of some of His attributes. This is known as the doctrine of Kenosis. Jesus laid aside His own power so that the world would see Him operating in power from Heaven and recognize the link between Him and Jehovah God. To the world Jesus looked like any other man. There was nothing that showed He was God. So, as He ministered and performed miracles, we frequently see Him pray to the Father for the coming miracles. So as Matthew quotes Isaiah's prophecy it was intended to show the relationship between Jesus and Jehovah.

The final phrase of verse 18 is another phrase that is often overlooked. In Matthew it is "He will proclaim justice to the Gentiles." In Isaiah it is "He will bring forth justice to the nations." Now track with me here. The Jews thought the Messiah was coming for them to bring justice for them. But Isaiah says bring justice to the nations. It is the Hebrew word "Goy" often translated as nations, pagans, heathen, or people. It is used to speak of non-Jewish peoples basically synonymous with gentile. How could the Jewish Messiah bring justice to the Gentile world?

Back in Matthew 8:11 we read:

*Matthew 8:11 (ESV)*

*11 I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven,*

Jesus was speaking there and He said the table that will fellowship with Jesus in heaven will be larger than just for Jews. It will be filled with people from all over the world.

Bringing Justice to the people of the world is the mission of the Messiah, not just justice for Israel. Matthew is building on the Idea that Jesus time was not yet right for Him to be sacrificed because when He would be sacrificed, ultimately on a Roman cross, the period of the Jews will come to a temporary end and the period of the Gentiles will be in full swing. I believe that the period of the gentiles began to ramp up in 722 when the northern tribes went into captivity. The time of the Gentiles came in a little more with the Babylonian captivity. And then at the cross, a little more and then was full-blown on pentecost when the church began. Salvation will come to the world for those chosen by God. Not just for Jews, but in this next phase of how God is dealing with the world, salvation will come to those of the world chosen by God. Justice in that that sin will be dealt with on the cross of Jesus.

*Matthew 12:19 (ESV)*

*19 He will not quarrel or cry aloud,*

*nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets;*

Matthew continues to build the picture of the Messiah. He will not stand in the street and argue with the opposition. In the present context here in Matthew, Jesus does the exact opposite by withdrawing from the opposition. Jesus was not seeking to call undue attention to Himself, which is what standing there toe to toe with the Pharisees would have done. Jesus was focused on the mission and mission directives from the Father. Ultimately Glory would be given to the Father for the work of Jesus in the world. There will come a time when Jesus will fight, but in many ways it will not be a fair fight as His enemies will be destroyed by His words coming out of His mouth.

*Matthew 12:20 (ESV)*

*20 a bruised reed he will not break,  
and a smoldering wick he will not quench,  
until he brings justice to victory;*

This verse uses some imagery that is a little difficult for us to grasp. Reeds were very useful in the ancient near east. Reeds, the stems from several different plants would be carved into walking sticks, carved into pens for writing. Fibers would be taken out and woven into writing paper, many other uses. They were so readily available that reeds that were broken were just discarded, thrown away. But here Matthew in quoting Isaiah reflects that Jesus was just like a reed that was broken and

normally would have just been thrown away or discarded. It would appear to the world and especially to the Jews that Jesus was not the guy to follow. He was not who they thought they were looking for. Jesus was the servant of Jehovah and subject to the timing the Father had established. He had to go through this oppression and opposition to go to the cross so that the gentile world and eventually Israel would turn to Him. The fact that He was not thrown away reflects God's patience until the right time for complete victory.

*Matthew 12:21 (ESV)*

*21 and in his name the Gentiles will hope.”*

Matthew's quotation of Isaiah 42:4 here in verse 21 leaves out the first half of the verse.

*Isaiah 42:4 (ESV)*

*4 He will not grow faint or be discouraged*

*till he has established justice in the earth;*

*and the coastlands wait for his law.*

Isaiah was writing that the Messiah will persevere even when oppressed and opposed. That is certainly true of Jesus. Matthew did not doubt that reality, but it did not contribute to the point He was making here in Matthew.

*Matthew 12:21 (ESV)*

21 *and in his name the Gentiles will  
hope.”*

Part of Matthew’s point is the faithfulness of God to Israel in the sending of the Messiah. But also that the Messiah will be the Messiah for the rest of the world as well. In fact, look at verse 20 and 21 together for a moment.

*Matthew 12:20–21 (ESV)*

20 *a bruised reed he will not break,  
and a smoldering wick he will not quench,  
until he brings justice to victory;*

21 *and in his name the Gentiles will  
hope.”*

To Israel Jesus does not look like the Messiah, something that should just be disposed of, thrown out. A smoldering wick that just makes smoke but provides very little consistent light. But God does not get rid of Him, why? Because in not looking right for Israel He is just perfect for the rest of the world. God would be patient for the messiah for Israel and give the Messiah to the world, until such a time that Israel is ready for the messiah. That is exactly the point Isaiah makes and Matthew also makes.

Think about this for a moment. Matthew is writing about 30 years after Jesus’ earthly ministry. He is explaining after the

church has begun, after the time of the gentiles is in full force. He is explaining what they saw and what they learned from Jesus about His mission. By this time Gentiles were being saved. Paul was preaching in Gentile cities and entire churches were made up just of gentiles. Matthew was explaining how this was all part of the plan of God to bring about the kingdom of Jesus.

## Conclusion

This is a difficult section of scripture. It was difficult for the disciples to live through and difficult for Jews to understand. We always have to remember that historical context of what the world of Israel was like when Jesus was walking the streets of Israel. An oppressed people, 6 or 700 years in the occupation desperately wanting to be free from foreign powers. The image of the messiah they had formed through their misunderstanding of scripture and through their own desires was not consistent with Jesus the Messiah right in front of them. He would speak like the Messiah. He would offer the kingdom to them. He would perform miracles that were associated with the Messiah. Yet he did not look like the Messiah, did not always act like the messiah. He would avoid confrontation and was not arrogant.

Thirty years later Matthew reminded the church that it was part of the plan of the Father. It was always the plan. It was not plan B since Jesus was rejected by Israel that salvation would come to the rest of the world. NO in quoting Isaiah Matthew showed that God was still on plan A, the first plan

Jesus' mission in His first coming was to bring justice for the world and provide a way for God to legally forgive us and expunge our records. We read recently in our daily reading about the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31 where Jeremiah says there is a day coming when God will write on the hearts of the Jews, interfacing directly heart to heart. That is yet to come, but in the meantime we have that same thing through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that we receive as soon as we are saved. God called us to be saved before He began creation and He orchestrated everything in the world to bring you to the point you were ready to follow Jesus and then He gave you faith to trust Him and you became a follower of Jesus. You then received God's writing on your heart as He interfaces directly with you, spirit to spirit, heart to heart.

Isaiah and Matthew both reflect that God's plan was not altered. The Messiah came to bring justice to the world, He will come again to bring Israel back to Him. You and I get to rule with Him, and Jesus reigns over Israel and the world for 1,000 years. All because God kept His plan. All because God chose you to be His. All because the Messiah came and was obedient to the Father, even in going to the cross.

Let's Pray!