



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 12:14-21

Topic

Jesus says hurting people are like bruised reeds
whom we should seek out to serve

Title

"Cruisin' for a Bruised Reed"

Introduction

If you are on Facebook, you probably saw a post with the following quotation: "Don't believe everything you read on the internet just because there's a picture with a quote next to it."

Great advice - **except that it was attributed to Abraham Lincoln with his picture next to it.**

Every now and then you *do* come across a remarkable quote. One that you know is true but that nevertheless makes you wonder.

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Matthew 12:14-21

"Cruisin' for a Bruised Reed"

You may be familiar with the writings of F.B. Meyer. He's a pastor and evangelist from the early 1900's who wrote over forty commentaries and devotionals. Good ones, I might add.

Meyer said,

When our Lord took on Himself the form of a servant, girded Himself and began to wash the feet of His disciples, it was no new office that He performed; **for the life of God is ever one of service**, of ministry. He rules all because He serves all.

I of course think of Jesus as a servant in His incarnation, when He became the God-man. But to say that "the life of God is **ever** one of service," that He was a servant *before* the incarnation and *remains* a servant still, isn't something I tend to dwell upon.

Dwell upon it or not, it's true. Jesus did not become a servant by coming to earth. He has always been, and will always be, a servant.

We know Jesus washed His disciples feet *before* their last supper. According to the Gospel of Luke Jesus will *in the future* wait upon us, His weary servants, at the marriage supper in Heaven (Luke 12:35-37). He remains a servant.

I'm talking about Jesus being a servant because that is how He is portrayed in these astonishing verses in chapter twelve of Matthew's Gospel. We will see He was sent to serve, but also that He still serves.

Seeing Him as servant should inspire us to replicate His serving as we yield ourselves to the Holy Spirit as He did.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 The God You Serve Came To Serve, and #2 The God You Serve Continues To Serve.

#1 The God You Serve Came To Serve

(v14-15)

I feel it necessary to say that I believe God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. That He exercises sovereignty, knows the end of all things, and rules the world by His divine providence.

I feel it necessary to say that because, when you say God has always been, and will always be, a servant, it can sound as though we are demoting Him or demeaning Him.

Not at all. Jesus is the fullest expression of, and the clearest representation of, the character and nature of God. He said of Himself, "anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). He said that to His disciples in the upper room shortly after washing their feet.

Seeing God as servant takes nothing away from Him. It adds to our wonderment as to His glory.

Mat 12:14 Then the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him.

Jesus had healed a man's withered hand on the Sabbath. Yes, the Pharisees were upset that He had violated their Sabbath rules. But what elevated it to wanting to "destroy" Jesus was the fact that He claimed to be greater than the Temple and to be Lord over the Sabbath.

Although greater... Although Lord... Jesus had come to serve.

Mat 12:15 But when Jesus knew it, He withdrew from there. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all.

In the Gospel of Mark we read that the multitudes were from Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and from beyond Jordan; and that were joined by another multitude of people, who came from Tyre and Sidon.

I mention that because it lets us know there were lots of Gentiles in that crowd as well as Jews.

We are in an important transitional section of the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus' offer to establish the kingdom of Heaven on earth that was promised the Jews was being rejected by the religious leaders of Israel. He was being rejected as the promised Messiah. Chapters twelve through fifteen will discuss the change in God's program for Israel in response to their rejection of King and kingdom.

His withdrawal from the synagogue to minister to a mixed group of Jews and Gentiles is symbolic of the fact that God, in response to Israel's rejection, would temporarily postpone establishing the kingdom on earth while calling out a people made up of Jews and Gentiles. In chapter sixteen Jesus will reveal that this new group is the church.

There were "multitudes" and Jesus "healed them all." Do you think of Jesus' healings as effortless? They weren't. He seems to have dealt with each person individually. Occasionally He may have encountered ten lepers at a time and healed them all at once. But even then there was personal interaction.

If you've ever been in need, and gone to an agency for help, you probably filled out forms rather than talking to someone about your unique situation. That's because it takes so much time to really interview someone; and it taxes the interviewers emotions. So the organization comes up with a way to quickly assess and meet needs. Otherwise its workers would get overwhelmed.

Jesus embodied what F.B. Meyer said; His life "was ever one of service." Whether it was serving His Father in the relative obscurity of growing up and learning obedience in Nazareth, or going about preaching and healing for three and one half years, or dying on the Cross - Jesus was servant.

I'm going to quote Meyer again. "Oh that He would so incarnate Himself **in us** that we, in our measure, may repeat those features of His earthly ministry."

Pause for a moment and in your heart sing, "Make me a servant... Make me a servant... Make me a servant today." When we serve, in humility, people see Jesus; they see God stooping to save them.

#2 The God You Serve Continues To Serve

(v16-21)

Matthew next does something that would be quite unmistakable to the Jews. He quotes from Isaiah 42. It is the first of a series of passages in Isaiah that are sometimes called the Servant Songs. The others are in chapters 49, 50, and 52-53.

Matthew applies those verses, those songs, to Jesus Christ. Jesus was and is the Servant being described. He was and is God's Savior to Israel and to the whole world.

Mat 12:16 Yet He warned them not to make Him known,
Mat 12:17 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah
the prophet, saying:

Mat 12:18 "BEHOLD! MY SERVANT WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN,
MY BELOVED IN WHOM MY SOUL IS WELL PLEASED! I WILL
PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM, AND HE WILL DECLARE JUSTICE
TO THE GENTILES.

Mat 12:19 HE WILL NOT QUARREL NOR CRY OUT, NOR WILL
ANYONE HEAR HIS VOICE IN THE STREETS.

Mat 12:20 A BRUISED REED HE WILL NOT BREAK, AND
SMOKING FLAX HE WILL NOT QUENCH, TILL HE SENDS
FORTH JUSTICE TO VICTORY;

Mat 12:21 AND IN HIS NAME GENTILES WILL TRUST."

Before we talk about each verse, a point I want to make is that
what we read here is still ongoing. This is what Jesus is about "till
He sends forth justice to victory."

When is that? Another translation says, "till He has made
righteousness overcome all" (BBE). Whether that refers to His
Second Coming to establish the delayed kingdom on earth, or to
His final judgment and the creation of new heavens and a new
earth - it's clearly still in the future.

And that is why we can say that Jesus continues to serve in the
ways these verses reveal; and He does it through you and I. He
does it incarnate, as it were, in you and I, by the indwelling of the
Spirit.

In verse sixteen "He warned them not to make Him known." They
always did, despite His warning, so I think the text is telling us
something more than Jesus was trying to avoid confrontation with
the religious leaders before it was time for His crucifixion.

His admonition to not tell is typical of a servant who is not looking for any glory, but only for God to receive praise.

It's hard for us to remain anonymous, isn't it? As much as we know we should remain anonymous, remain unknown behind the scenes, we can become offended when our name isn't listed or read, or when no one encourages us.

Hey, that's coming at the end, and it's coming from Jesus at His judgement seat. Wait for it.

Another insight we might do well to glean from this idea of being "chosen" is that we ought not to appoint ourselves to any position, but rather let The Lord place us as He sees fit.

Mat 12:18 "BEHOLD! MY SERVANT WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN, MY BELOVED IN WHOM MY SOUL IS WELL PLEASED! I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM, AND HE WILL DECLARE JUSTICE TO THE GENTILES.

"Behold!" directs your attention where it should be - on Jesus. Whatever I learn from God's Word should enhance my understanding of The Lord - Who He is and what He did, is doing, and will do.

Mankind's greatest need was for a "servant." Someone who would take your place in death, paying the penalty for your sins, so that God could declare you righteous.

But to be that servant you'd have to be a man to identify with mankind, AND you'd have to be God in order for your substitutionary sacrifice to be effective.

Jesus took the form of that servant, the God-man, leaving Heaven and humbling Himself by dying on the Cross.

Jesus was "chosen" by God. There is a lot of doctrine packaged in that idea of being "chosen," but the thing I get, in this context, is that God chose to do something in response to mankind's rebellion against Him. Something wonderful.

He chose to send His only begotten Son into our story as a man to serve us on the Cross and thereby save us.

Jesus was always God's "beloved" in that He was one with God and God Himself.

In the incarnation, as Jesus grew and lived upon the earth as a man, God was "well pleased." That means, among other things, that Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life, only always doing His Father's will and work.

The Father "put [His] Spirit upon" Jesus. At His baptism, the Holy Spirit came upon The Lord to empower Him in His serving. It becomes an example to us of how to be baptized by, filled with, and led by the Holy Spirit, because He is just as available to us as He was to Jesus.

His "declaring justice to the Gentiles" is ongoing, is it not? It's a phrase that describes the entire time between the Lord's ascension into Heaven and the resurrection and rapture of the church, a time in which the Gospel is going out beyond just an offer of the kingdom to Israel.

God gave Jesus the Spirit for His mission and ministry and, after He ascended, God gave His church - gave us - the Spirit to continue His mission and ministry until He returns.

Mat 12:19 HE WILL NOT QUARREL NOR CRY OUT, NOR WILL ANYONE HEAR HIS VOICE IN THE STREETS.

It is often said that the Jews expected and were looking for a powerful political and military leader as their Messiah. It made sense, on one level, in that they were a subjugated people, subject to the Roman government.

The Servant Songs of Isaiah make it clear that their Messiah would *not* be a political or military man. Verse nineteen sort of sums that up nicely. He would lead no public revolution but, instead, offer personal transformation.

He would not shed Roman blood, but would shed His own blood to save Israel and us.

In passing we might note that one day the Jews will think they have a political and military Messiah, but he will be revealed as antichrist, not Jesus Christ.

Mat 12:20 A BRUISED REED HE WILL NOT BREAK, AND SMOKING FLAX HE WILL NOT QUENCH, TILL HE SENDS FORTH JUSTICE TO VICTORY;

Mat 12:21 AND IN HIS NAME GENTILES WILL TRUST."

Jesus had been followed by multitudes, including Gentiles. Twice in this Isaiah passage Gentiles are named. It's signaling a major change in God's prophetic program.

We'll see it more clearly in chapter thirteen where, in a series of parables, The Lord outlines how the Gospel will spread to the whole world during the time between His ascension and Second Coming.

Eventually, in chapter sixteen, Jesus will reveal that He is going to begin building His church - something brand new, not revealed in the Old Testament.

In that 'mean time,' during this church age in which we are empowered by God's indwelling Holy Spirit to be servants, it would do well for us to see and to serve people the way Jesus did.

Although not a complete description of Him as God's servant, two things are mentioned: "a bruised reed He will not break," and "smoking flax He will not quench."

For lack of a better word, this captures the attitude we ought to have as servants.

Obviously "reeds" and "flax" are meant to represent people - both ourselves and those we are sent by Jesus to serve. The Holy Spirit is here describing people whose grace is at present weak, whose repentance is feeble, and whose faith is small. Towards such persons the Lord Jesus Christ is very tender and compassionate.

"Reeds" were stems of a variety of species of plants. They were carved into ink pens or walking sticks, or their fibers were used for weaving or making into parchment for writing on.

Because of their abundance reeds were not very valuable. Bruised reeds, ones that were damaged in any way, were useless and worthless and wouldn't be given a second look.

Have you ever felt bruised - emotionally and spiritually? Another way of asking it is, Have you ever been hurt?

I'm happy for you if you can honestly answer "No," but most of us go through life bruised and hurting on many levels.

God looks upon us as bruised reeds that are valuable and that can be made useful. Our bruising isn't allowed by Him to 'break' us but to make us a people of compassion who have passion to minister to others the grace of God that is sufficient in every circumstance.

"Flax" is what was used as the wick in an oil lamp. A wick on an oil lamp might smolder because it was low on oil or trimmed improperly. Usually a smoldering wick would be put out, because it would produce smoke but no light.

Have you ever felt that you were in a place that you could not see your way out of? As if you were in the dark, groping? Then, just when you thought it couldn't possibly get any worse, you felt as if you were choking on smoke, suffocating emotionally and spiritually?

Again - if you've never been in a place like that, I'm thrilled for you. Most of us *have* found ourselves groping in the dark, gasping for breath. Some of us are in a place like that currently.

The psalmist referred to it as "walking through the valley of the shadow of death." I know Psalm 23 is a favorite at funerals, but the valley of the shadow of death isn't describing you *after* you die. It's describing how life feels, not death.

The Lord isn't allowing it to "quench" us, but rather that we would yield to His Spirit to rekindle our flame. That we might realize He alone lights our path and is the lamp unto our feet.

You know that in the new heavens and the new earth, all the light comes from God Himself?

Rev 22:5 There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.

God is just as much our light now as He will be then. It's not Him who leads us into the dark, but He can and will lead us out from it.

TILL HE SENDS FORTH JUSTICE TO VICTORY; AND IN HIS NAME GENTILES WILL TRUST."

"Till" The Lord comes to claim His victory and establishes righteousness, the Gospel is being sent out to the Gentiles.

It's being sent out by us being sent out with it. Wherever we are, wherever we go, we have this treasure in earthen vessels.

At times we will be like bruised reeds and smoking flax. God is sufficient for us.

Other times the folks we encounter will be like bruised reeds and smoking flax. We are to serve them as The Lord serves us.

One commentary put it like this:

There are some in every congregation hearing the Gospel who are ready to despair of their own salvation because their strength seems so small. They are full of fears and despondency because their knowledge, faith, hope and love appear so dwarfish and diminutive.

Let them drink comfort out of this text; let them know that weak faith gives a man as real and true an interest in Christ as strong faith, though it may not give him the same joy. There is life in an infant as truly as in an adult; there is fire in a spark as truly as in a burning flame. The least degree of grace is an everlasting possession. It comes down from Heaven; it is precious in our Lord's eyes. It will never be overthrown.

Maybe you are bruised and smoldering today. The Lord wants to bind you up, and to fan your flame.

Even while you are waiting for Him to serve you, you can serve others - come alongside to bind them up, to fan their smoldering wick into flame.

Jesus was God's Suffering Servant. So are you after Him, until the end of the age, when He will serve us at the marriage supper.