

Matthew 12:1-21

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Date: 19 June 2023

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[0 : 0 0] comes from Matthew chapter 12 verses 1 to 21. That's Matthew 12 1 to 21. At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it they said to him look your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath. He said to them have you not read what David did when he was hungry and those who were with him? How he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the presence which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profaned the Sabbath and are guiltless? I tell you something greater than the temple is here and if you had known what this means I desire mercy and not sacrifice you would not have condemned the guiltless for the son of man is the lord of the Sabbath. He went on from there and entered their synagogue and a man was there with a withered hand and they asked him is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath so they might accuse him? He said to them which one of you who has a sheep if it falls into a pit on the

Sabbath will not take hold of it and lift it out. Of how much more value is a man than a sheep? So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. And he said to the man stretch out your hand and the man stretched it out and it was restored healthy like the other. But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him how to destroy him. Jesus aware of this withdrew from there and many followed him and he healed them all and ordered them not to make him known. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah.

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. He will not quarrel or cry aloud nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break and a smoldering wick he will not quench until he brings justice to victory and in his name the Gentiles will hope. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well as you're being seated I just want to give you my welcome. It's so great to have you here. And Jason please greet Laura and the rest of the family in London. We celebrate your ministry in our midst and we are so grateful that the Lord continues to send out people all over the world with with the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so we counted a privilege to pray for you and to be involved with your work now over many years and and personally I look forward to going to the White Sox game with you on Tuesday night. We'll be able to catch up then. Well let me pray.

Our Heavenly Father as we look again at your word today we pray that it would minister to our minds and our hearts in ways that would strengthen this church to the glory of your name. And it is in Jesus name that we pray. Amen. I want to title today's talk simply this. Jesus our best hope. Just scroll your eyes back down to the very last line of the reading today and you'll see something to the effect that in his name the Gentiles will hope. That is where we're going. Jesus our best hope.

[3 : 4 8] It seems to me that the three scenes which comprise the reading of the day provide an argument for that conclusion. He's our best hope because unlike those who are heavy-handed and hard-hearted he's going to welcome you with open arms and a tender heart. Anyone that welcomes you with an open arms and a tender heart is going to be your best hope and we're going to see that today from Jesus.

And that's quite a distinction from the world in which we presently live. Let me open this way. When it comes to assessing the spiritual sensitivities of those that are entrusted with gospel work, we live in a difficult day.

We live in a sad day. You might actually call it a discouraging day. Every day church-going men and women are wondering where they find the hope of justice or the hope in their own cause when so many pastors and religious leaders fall so woefully short.

You think it's bad in the country when you're looking for politicized or legislative leaders that will bring hope through justice? Imagine what it's like in the church. I read again this week of documentaries that are taking place in regard to those that have been entrusted with spiritual work, yet they fall so woefully short.

Now, let's be clear on this. This text is not referring to the ministry of Jesus in contrast to those whose lives are short that he ought to be addressing with real sin.

[5 : 34] He's not referring to a stubbornness of heart that won't receive correction or reproof. I mean, we actually saw last week, did we not, his woes to entire cities that would not come under the instruction or the correction of his word.

No, we're speaking more or less today of those who are learning, coming to Jesus, hoping for something better, something more.

And we live in a day where those men and women are being trampled underfoot. Our text today, and take a look at it, provides two interactions with Jesus, particularly interactions that he had with pastors of his own day.

And those two interactions, first in the grain fields, verse 1, and then behind the church door, verse 9, give way to the encouragement when he withdraws from there to show himself as a better hope. The text really is going to be a warning. Well, let me get it straight. A warning for people like myself who have been entrusted with spiritual leadership.

[6 : 55] It's going to be an encouragement to men and women in the pew who are looking for direction and hope in the midst of a religious environment that is at times pressing down and hard upon them, not for their rebellion, but simply through the mishaps of those who lead them.

Two interactions in the fields, in the synagogue. The first encounter is in the fields. And what we learn here is that the pastors of his day were what you might just call heavy-handed.

Verse 1, He went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry. They began to pluck heads of grain and to eat.

But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, Look, your disciples are not doing what is lawful to do on the Sabbath. That accusation, the accusatory word against the learners, those who had, in a fresh way, thought maybe Jesus was worth following, listening to, learning from.

And in come the pastors of his day, pressing heavy down upon them. This accusatory glance. It's not simply a statement, Look, they're eating grain. No, it's highlighted by the detail of being on the Sabbath with a restriction of work.

[8 : 12] It concludes, even down there in verse 7 and 8, Jesus says that they had, in doing so, condemned the guiltless. The accusation, which is really a word of condemnation.

Pastors. Condemning. Learners. Coming in a heavy-handed way.

I looked up the word heavy-handed. Overly forceful. Pressing down. Think of it as battering.

Excessive. Harsh. The result is, really, a bruising then. A bruising on the learners.

A breaking of the spirit of those who are expressing interest. Of those who are looking to learn. Of those who are spiritually tender and have begun to walk in ways that satisfy, in some sense, a newfound hunger.

[9 : 21] A spiritual hunger. Of those who are longing to be righteous and think that Jesus might actually afford that. And yet, the ministers of his day would accuse them of, in this case, working on the Sabbath.

Can you imagine? Boy, if that's work, it's not a... If that's work and you can get it, might as well go for it. Simply walking along the grain fields and pulling the heads of grain.

Taking the small bits of outer shell. Popping it in and moving along. This was, of course, from the pastors of his day, a violation of the third commandment given back in Exodus 20, where on the Sabbath day, you're supposed to rest.

But these pastors were so heavy-handed. They had more than 37 rules that would be laid down upon you on the Sabbath day. All kinds of things you couldn't do.

All kinds of things that weren't acceptable. I mean, the list is long. You couldn't make a fire. You couldn't ride a beast. You couldn't jump in a ship or on a ship.

[10 : 32] Let's put it that way. You couldn't kill a beast. You couldn't catch a fish. Even rules on how far you could walk. In other words, there was a pettiness in rule-keeping by those who were charged with spiritual leadership.

Well, we've got heavy-handed pastors today. That's right. Harsh. Abusive. Bringing down more and more battering-ram-like rules upon constituencies.

Those who press upon spiritually tender shoots that are simply wanting to walk alongside Jesus and learn.

Is there hope? Is there hope? I mean, you're going to read the newspaper this week, and you're going to be encountering again heavy-handedness. Is there hope?

Well, look what Jesus does. Jesus becomes your advocate. I love what he does here in verse 3 through 7. He's going to actually make three simple appeals that would put the pastors of his day in their place and allow the learners to come along the way.

[11 : 59] The first is an appeal to King David. He appeals to Israel's history books. Verses 3 and 4. He said to them, In other words, he appeals to a king, their own king, who did something in the house of God, eating, which seemed to be a violation of this kind of thing.

But after appealing to the history books, he appeals to their law. Look at verse 5. Or have you not read in the law how on the Sabbath the priests of the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? In other words, even the priest had to eat the bread on the table week by week, and they weren't necessarily then working. So he appeals to the history of Israel by pointing to their king.

He appeals to the Torah by appointing to the priesthood. And then he looks at them as though their great concern is with the house of God and bread and what you can and cannot do.

And look what he says to them. I mean, it's a stunning line, really. I tell you something greater than the temple is here. You're worried about what you do and don't do in the house of God?

[13 : 24] I am greater than all of that. It's a rebuke of the highest order. But he's not content merely to go to the history books or the law.

He turns to the prophets as well. Take a look at verse 7. And if you had known what this means, thy desire of mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Lord, for the Son of Man, is Lord of the Sabbath.

You know, we've come along this quotation twice now. Chapter 9. In fact, at the calling of Matthew into ministry and following Jesus, Jesus uses this quotation.

But back then he had said, go and learn what it means to desire mercy, not sacrifice. But now, here it is, just a few chapters later, evidently they didn't go and learn. Because now he simply says, if you had known, if you had taken me up on my word, if you had gone back to Hosea the prophet, chapter 6, verse 6, if you had understood what Hosea was saying, namely this word mercy, translated in Greek, is literally like steadfast love in Hebrew.

Their love for God was as fickle as the morning dew, said Hosea. All about it early in the day. But as soon as the sun rises, their love for God would dissipate.

[14 : 50] It would evaporate. They had no steadfastness of love. They had no knowledge of God. They had reduced all relationship to God to rules which had been followed.

Not only that, in Hosea, they were an adulterous priesthood. They sought their own gain. They gained money for their own purses. They committed all kinds of immorality.

And Jesus is saying, you don't know what you're talking about, do you? In the words of Dylan, something's happening here and you don't know what it is, do you, Mr. Jones?

Yeah, something's happening here, says Jesus. I'm Lord of the Sabbath. I'm greater than the temple. Why are you condemning the guiltless?

See, this is the nature of the yoke that they had placed upon them. You remember last week, did you not? Jesus says, come unto me, all who are weary, heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

[15 : 54] Take my yoke upon you. The yoke of the Pharisees was a burdensome one in which they were not even willing to lift and help out with. This is Jesus' words to a heavy-handed pastorate.

If your concern was for the Sabbath, then know this, the Lord of the Sabbath is here. If your concern is for giving rest to people, then know that they find rest in me, not in your rules.

And this ought to be an encouragement to you. This is one of the reasons why Jesus is our best hope. No matter what you read in the coming weeks about heavy-handed ministers, Jesus is your best hope.

He will not condemn you, but rather protect you. The second exchange begins there in verse 19.

Not only does he have a word of warning for pastors who are heavy-handed, he has a word of warning for pastors who are hard-hearted.

The scene changes in verse 9, doesn't it? You're no longer in the fields. You're not even in the churchyard. You're in the building itself. It says he entered the synagogue.

[17:13] Notice it was their synagogue where they called the shots. And a man was there with a withered hand, and they asked him, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath so that they might accuse him?

And he said to them, which one of you having a sheep or if it falls into the pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? Or how much more value is a man than a sheep? So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.

Then he said to the man, stretch out your hand. And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other. But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him how to destroy him. Do you see the two units now?

An accusation that leads to condemnation of the guiltless. But here, looking to accuse him, which leads to conspiracy against him, that is our Lord. Notice how hard-hearted they are.

I mean, it's on full display. They have a hard heart toward Jesus. They don't want Jesus in their church. But with profound irony, the nature of their heart is so hard toward the man with a withered hand.

[18:27] Is it not? They are now using, seizing upon, a man whose hand is seized up in hopes that Jesus will heal him so that they can accuse Jesus of performing work on the Sabbath.

It does not get any worse than this. Their hard-heartedness is on full display.

They take this man's physical disability as nothing more than the pawn in a game that they're playing in order to checkmate Jesus. That's callousness of a different order.

And unlike the first scene where Jesus offers the rebuttal, here he simply does what? It says, Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there.

Now you're really moving. Are you not in the text? This is why I said at the very outset that what we're seeing here is your best hope is Jesus because he's going to greet you with open arms and a tender heart, unlike those who are heavy-handed and hard-hearted.

[19:40] And that's exactly what happens here. Jesus doesn't actually speak at this moment, but Matthew decides to pick up a prophetic discourse of Isaiah to bear testimony to Jesus as your better hope.

He aware of this, He withdrew, many followed Him, He healed, He ordered them not to make Him known, and this was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah.

You can find it in your Bibles later this afternoon in chapter 42, where Israel, who was supposed to be God's loving, tender, open-armed servant, has been replaced for their heavy-handedness and hard-heartedness, and Jesus now is the one who comes with open arms and a tender heart.

He is God's servant. I want you to look carefully at this quotation. It must be important if He decides to pull from it and place it here.

What is it about Jesus that brings you into His open arms? Notice what it says in verse 18. He will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.

[20:52] And notice how it brackets it in verse 20. Until He brings justice to victory and in His name the Gentiles hope. He will proclaim justice to those who are without hope until He brings justice to them.

Now, let's just get this straight. When Jesus comes to you with open arms, you need to know that the bad news of His open arms is a lot worse than you ever could have imagined.

If He's proclaiming justice like He already did in the Sermon on the Mount, He's not worried about picking a little grain on the Sabbath on your way to church.

He goes to the very heart issues of life. He says, if you want to really talk about righteousness, Jesus lays the whole world of righteousness open to you. He says, God is holy, dwells in the heavens.

If a man sins against one part of the law, he sins against it all. All have sinned. All have fallen short. All without hope. Save His sovereign mercy.

[22:04] And the people that Jesus is going to are receiving are receiving the largeness of the open-handed teaching of Jesus on righteousness.

But then, He says here, until He brings justice to victory. Now just think about what that means. Ultimately, the word on righteousness and justice, which will give you hope, comes from Jesus who secures that on the cross where He lays His arms open for you.

The cross is the means by which justice is secured. This is what happens with Jesus. He tells you, you are far worse off than you ever could have imagined. But you are far more loved than you ever knew.

And so Jesus proclaims the fullness of righteous judgment and He secures your righteous victory by being your substitute in taking God's wrath.

And that's why the Gentiles have hope. It's interesting when you think about what Matthew must be doing at this moment in the text as a whole.

[23 : 25] I know we started it last Advent and so it's hard sometimes to see where are we in Matthew. I come week by week but what's happening in Matthew's mind? Well, he opened by saying, I'm going to tell you about Jesus, son of David, son of Abraham.

Son of David meant He was the king of the Jews. Son of Abraham, He was going to be hope to the whole world. He's going to close His whole book down by saying, Jesus has all authority over all nations for all allegiance.

But now, He's already come son of David. He's come to the house of Israel. He's been rejected by the pastors of His day. And so when He withdraws from there, you're seeing in Matthew's argument, Jesus is now taking His ministry from the synagogue to the street.

He's moving from simply a ministry that will help those who had the promises in Israel to you and me who are not Jews and yet we now have one in whom we can hope, one in whom we can run to, one who will embrace us, one who will tell us, yes, you're worse off than you ever could have imagined and you were more loved than you ever knew.

Wow. The ministry of Jesus is good for all of us. And it means that we transfer our hope from any living minister to the ministry of Jesus who lives forever in righteousness.

[24 : 52] But not only is it open arms, but it's tender. He's not hard-hearted. I love this phrase. Take a look at it.

Look at it with your own eyes. Meditate on these words, 19 and 20. He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break and a smoldering wick He will not quench.

Two word pictures to demonstrate Jesus' way with you. He sees you as a bruised reed and smoldering wick.

But, oh bruised reed you are, He will not break you. Smoldering wick, He will not extinguish you. Instead, He cherishes you. Now, there's a book by an old dead man now for a couple centuries by the name of Richard Sibbes, and he talks about this bruised reed quite a bit.

[26 : 02] And he makes the point that the bruised reed has not merely been bruised by external forces that didn't like them or were heavy-handed toward them.

He makes the point that a lot of the bruisedness of our reeds is done by our own sin and waywardness. Huh, think of it now that way.

Certainly, there are ministers and pastors whose heavy-handedness and hard-heartedness are bruising many, but certainly, we would all know that we bruise ourselves, do we not? And He does not break you.

He comes around your own bruising and ministers to you. Sibbes says that taken together these make up the state of a poor, distressed man who sees himself indebted to divine justice and no means of supply from himself.

He thereupon mourns and He has some hope of mercy from the promise and it stirs up in Him a hunger and thirst after righteousness. Have you ever had that happen? Have you thought of yourself as subject to the winds?

[27 : 16] And sure, external forces have been difficult on your life, but internal weaknesses have also bent the reed.

and Jesus comes to protect as we mourn what we've done to ourselves, as we grieve the things that we've undergone, as we look to one who would support, strengthen, make you stand tall.

I was just here yesterday looking at the planters, two days ago looking at the planters out front, which we tenderly care for, there were two shoots on either end and as my wife and I looked at them the day before one had begun to slide, she said, that's all right, I've got a bamboo, a couple of bamboo stakes at home.

So all of a sudden we take this long, slender bamboo stake, put it down in by that tender chute, put it close enough where wire can be there and all of a sudden that which was subject to the forces of

life stands tall.

That's what Jesus does for you. It wasn't long ago I was with a grandchild in a pizza shop and now that straws are no longer made from plastic they brought one to and made of paper.

[28 : 42] He trashed that thing within half a bottle, he couldn't even finish his milk. Why? Because the paper straw only worked if you're old enough to like very carefully make sure no saliva gets on the outside of it, just all the milk comes on the inside.

But all it has to do is just a little bruising, just a little tearing and a two-year-old is pretty good at that. And about halfway through I had to say to the waiter, can you give me another straw?

In fact, I might need a handful of them because this bruised reed is broken. Jesus comes along and says, I know you're bruised, but you'll be able to take the living waters from me and I will support you and I will uphold you and I will come around you and I will heal you and I will guard you and I will be a shade in the sun to you.

The moon shall not strike you at night nor the sun by day. Jesus is your better hope because he's so open-armed rather than heavy-handed because he's so tender in his care.

Think about it. The Lord looks at us. He doesn't see trees. He sees reeds.

[30 : 09] And he promises, says Jesus, says Matthew, Jesus is the one who will not break you for all your bruises. Come on, is Jesus your better hope?

Oh, he's our hope. He's one whose characteristics resemble looking at you as a smoldering wick, but he will not quench your flame.

I've got a solo stove. Oh, okay, you might think I spent too much money on it, but I really like it. The solo stove is different than just an outdoor fireplace.

It takes the oxygen from underneath the logs so that there's always air coming in from underneath so that the smoldering smoking logs are rare in my solo stove because it's always being fed from underneath.

Yesterday, all the logs had gone dry. It was burned out. There were ashes, and I took something that we had done hot dogs with, just a little stick, and I put the stick down in there, and I said to my grandson, watch this.

[31 : 21] I said, that's going to become a fire. Grandpa, that can't be a fire. There's no fire in there. Oh, no, where there's smoke. There's fire. And we stood there, and my grandson said, well, we'll back up, and they backed up to look into the stove.

Suddenly, after literally three or four minutes, the smoke began to increase. Suddenly, a flame emerged. Suddenly, the fire was rekindled.

The sensitivity of care, Jesus, will come underneath you through the power of the spirit like air. He will take that smoldering wick.

He will take that wood that no longer fires. He will take a life of anxiety in ways that have been mistreated and mistreated yourself.

He will take something which just even a cup of water on you would have doused all hope from you, and he will suddenly put his presence in your life, and the embers will warm, and your heart that is cold, and wondering if there's hope, will be rekindled, and you will find yourself fanned into flame through the warmth and the tender care of our Lord.

[32 : 44] That's what Isaiah is saying, that Jesus is so unlike the hard-hearted ones who could care less about your well-being, he will gently lay himself down that you might be enlightened and have life.

Let me put it to you this way, the one who was conspired against in the second scene, conspired against unto death, will not condemn you, but save you.

Doesn't Jesus look appealing? Come on. Doesn't he look appealing? Think of the ministry of our Lord. Think of the characteristics of the text. Think of why the quote ends with, in his name, you will hope.

Jesus is our best hope. He's our best hope because he's so unlike those who are heavy handed and hard-hearted. He's your best hope because he comes to you with open arms and he says, I know all about you and God's wrath and judgment ought to fall, but I'm going to cover you.

I'm going to sustain you. I'm going to watch over you. I'm going to support you. I'm going to root you. I'm going to grow you.

[34 : 15] You're going to be his everlasting plantings to the glory of God. Some of you today are sitting here today saying, I don't know if I have any hope.

My life is kind of extinguished. Some of it brought on by myself. Some of it, the wounds that I bear from others.

Jesus says, let me come alongside you. Let the servant who has the spirit upon him, the one with whom is the beloved. Would you just allow Jesus to be your hope?

Our best hope is Jesus because he greets us with open arms and a tender heart. Why would you not yet then come to him? I will lift up mine eyes to the hills.

From whence cometh my help? My help cometh from the Lord. The Lord who made heaven and earth, he said, he will not suffer thy foot to be moved.

[35 : 27] I mean, there's just so many beautiful things. When you think about it, the Lord which keepeth thee, he will not slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper. The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand, upon thy right hand.

No, the sun shall not smite thee by day or the moon by night. He shall preserve your soul even forever more. My help, your help, our help, our hope comes from the Lord.

Our help comes from the Lord. May he then receive the praise of our lives. Our heavenly Father, as we've looked at this scene, three scenes, certainly I know that two of them are directed as great warnings for those like myself who have been entrusted with spiritual leadership.

Lord, may you help all in ministry as we labor for your name to take on even in greater greater ways the characteristics of our Lord.

And may we point people to him and you may you be kind and tender and gentle with your church. We pray all of this in Jesus' name.

[37 : 04] Amen.