

A Bruised Reed

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[0 : 00] Please turn back with me in the Bible to Matthew chapter 12 and to the words of verse 20. A bruised reed he will not break. A bruised reed he will not break. Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence.

May your word be our rule. Your spirit our teacher and your greater glory, our supreme concern through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Jesse Ventura is a well-known wrestler, actor, and former governor of the U.S. state of Minnesota, where Alex Nelson comes from.

In a 2007 interview, Jesse Ventura gave voice to something which I've had thrown at me as a Christian hundreds of times. He said, Organized religion is a crutch for weak-minded people.

[1 : 11] Organized religion is a crutch for weak-minded people. I guess you've heard the same thing being said, right? Christianity is a crutch for the weak.

You know, I couldn't agree less with Jesse Ventura. I don't want to say it to his face because he's bigger than me. But I couldn't agree less with him and his crutch-type objection, or with the hundreds of people who have thrown it in my face over the years.

In fact, it makes me rather angry when I hear the crutch-type objection. And I don't agree with it for three reasons. First of all, get real.

Every person, especially alpha males, is weak in their own unique ways, not just those who find comfort in Christianity. Jesse Ventura, you are a weak man when faced with old age and mortality. Don't kid yourself. You're just not being very honest with yourself or with others. Secondly, Christians don't find a crutch in Christianity.

[2 : 21] We find it in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Not a system, but a saviour. Not a program, but a person. Jesse Ventura clearly has never encountered Jesus Christ for himself.

And then thirdly, you could not get more wrong about the crutch imagery. Christianity is not a crutch for weak people. It is a life support machine for dying people.

It's far more drastic than being a crutch for weak people. It's a life support machine for dying people. Our weaknesses are far more drastic than Jesse Ventura or anyone else can imagine.

Now, I used to answer the Christianity is a crutch for weak objection by becoming defensive and saying, well, nonsense.

I know many strong people who are Christians. But now I realize that those who throw this objection in my face aren't admitting how weak they really are, how strong Jesus Christ really is, or how much they need his help.

[3 : 34] And over the course of a conversation, I try to gently point out these things to them by telling them the story of how, in my own personal weaknesses, Jesus has proved himself stronger than I could ever have imagined him to be.

In this verse, Matthew 12, 20, Jesus says of himself, a bruised reed he will not break.

A bruised reed he will not break. Are there any bruised reeds here today? I'm speaking especially to alpha-type males like me.

Are there any bruised reeds here today? Broken people who don't need a crutch to walk, but a life support machine to stay alive.

Are there any damaged people who feel themselves to be beyond any kind of repair? Listen to the words of Jesus again in this verse. A bruised reed I will not break.

[4 : 37] You're in the right place today. You're at the right time today to hear about a Jesus who, rather than weakening you further and damaging you more, will love you, will soothe your wounded heart, and bind up your broken mind.

Let me suggest that we understand Jesus as not breaking the bruised reed under three headings. First, Christ and his people. Second, Christ, sorry, Christ and his people. I've written the first two things the same. Christ and his people. Then secondly, Christ and his peace. Then thirdly, Christ and his passion. Christ and his people. Christ and his peace. Christ and his passion. Christ and his people. Let me ask this question to you again. I'm speaking as one man to other men. Any bruised reeds here today? Beaten up, spat out by the world. Christ and his people. Christ and his people. This might be your first time in church ever. This might be your millionth time in church. [5 : 56] But you're here this morning because you are utterly desperate. And you're looking for answers. And you're looking for answers. Well, you won't find them anywhere else. But you will find them in Jesus Christ.

Christ, first of all then, and his people. Christ and his people. It is very easy to wear a mask to hide an inner hurt. It is very easy to pretend we are strong when really we are falling apart. Perhaps you have an image of Christians as very strong people. Strong in faith. Strong in character. Strong in religion. Let me tell you that whatever image you may have, the reality is altogether different.

The truth is that Christ's people are very weak indeed. Beaten, battered and bruised people. For decency's sake, some might wear a mask or pretend to be different. But Christ's people, one and all, are bruised reeds. We all are. From the least to the greatest, every Christian is at the very most a bruised reed.

[7 : 03] Whatever strength is in us isn't from us but from Jesus Christ. We are weak, we are blind and we are stumbling. We might look as if we've got it all together. We wear nice clothes.

We speak well. We use the word please rather than gonna. And thank you rather than ta. But underneath we're all damaged and we're all weak, every one of us.

From the poorest to the richest, every Christian is at best a bruised reed. When I was in a school in Gospey High School and the PE class for the day was a game of football, the PE teacher would choose two captains and then those captains would pick his teams.

The first footballers to be chosen were the strongest and the fastest and the most skillful boys. The worst footballers were the worst footballers. The worst footballers were the last to be chosen. The weakest, the slowest and the clumsiest boys. Is that the way Jesus chooses and measures us? Does he survey the human race and does he choose as his people the strongest, fastest and most skillful of them all?

[8 : 20] Does he choose the reeds who stand tall and healthy and strong? His people are all bruised reeds. Every one of them.

The last to be chosen by the world. The foolish things of the world. Those whom the world rejects as weak, slow and clumsy. Those whom the world chooses last.

Jesus chooses first. Consider those with whom Jesus works in the Gospels. The lepers, outcasts and sinners.

The mentally disturbed. The physically disabled. The spiritually confused. Oh, that rich young ruler who came to Jesus. He'd have made a fine Christian, don't you think?

We might think so. But Jesus knew different. This verse, it follows on from the account of how Jesus healed a man with a withered hand.

[9 : 19] This man was an outcast from decent society. Polite company wouldn't have invited them for dinner at their home. He wasn't welcome among the religious because of his deformity.

But it was this bruised reed Jesus loved and chose to work with. Not the high and mighty religious leaders of the day. Those who thought they were strong and wise and great.

Jesus drawn to the bruised reeds. Those who realize just how weak and fragile and vulnerable they are. It's exactly the same today.

Jesus is drawn, if I may use such language, to the weakest among us. The very poorest specimens of humanity.

Let's go back to Mr. Ventura who said, organized religion is a crutch for the weak-minded. Okay, I'm an alpha type male.

[10 : 21] I have mixed it up with tough guys like Jesse Ventura. And I've sat around academic meetings with the smartest professors in our universities.

And I've enjoyed having dinner with some of the richest people in our society. And the more I got to know them and the more I get to know them, the more I realize that what they project to you in public is a very cleverly designed mask to hide their inner weakness, poverty and confusion. Behind that mask, they are entirely as weak and fragile, entirely as bruised and broken as any of us. In private, those alpha males who knock seven bells out of each other on the football pitch will cry on your shoulder, just as I have on theirs.

They're just as broken as you are. I don't like speaking about my family background because somehow I feel as if I'm dishonoring my dad's memory. But I think given the change in the last few months of his life, he wouldn't mind.

After serving in the RAF, my father spent his life working as an intelligence officer for the British government. I didn't know ever what he did until shortly before he died, he broke his lifelong code of silence.

[11 : 51] It was then I learned that he spoke fluent Russian and Turkish. And I'd been heavily involved in Soviet counter-espionage during the 1960s.

Now on the outside, my dad was a very strong man. He was a tournament-winning golfer who could have gone professional in his young years. A semi-professional footballer.

A great fisherman who made his own flies. My dad was a proper man's man. Oh, he could drink any of you under the table. He was a disciplinarian.

My dad was. He taught my brothers and myself, you never show emotion, boy. My wife and kids have never seen me cry once.

Because it was driven into me as a boy. Don't you ever show emotion, boy. He was the Scottish version of Jesse Ventura, only harder.

[12 : 54] Unless pretentious. A proper alpha male. But behind the scenes and behind closed door, my dad was a broken man. He'd been broken by his experiences in the intelligence services in the 1960s.

The traumatic things he had seen and done. The world-changing importance of the intelligence that he provided, which led to death. So behind closed doors, I've never told anyone this before.

My wife knows it. Behind closed doors, after winning that golf tournament, he would drink himself into oblivion to hide the brokenness and weakness of his heart.

And having drunk himself onto the floor, after shouting at us all and cursing us all to high heaven, he'd cry and cry and cry until there were no more tears to shed.

And then me and my brothers would carry him along to bed. This big, strong alpha male who had beat everyone in Broda Golf Club into the ground.

[14 : 02] This big, strong alpha male with the tears rolling down his cheeks. Is that you today? It was only the last few months of my dad's life that he left behind the public persona of being strong and tough.

He began to admit to himself that he was entirely as weak as the next bloke. Whereas before in his drink-fueled cursing sessions, he would shout into my face, your faith is a crutch for the weak boy. And you ain't weak. He now admitted to himself, finally, that he was just as weak as the next guy. He started reading a Bible.

I bought him. He started going with my mother to church. And shortly before he died, he became a Christian. Now, why do I tell you these things?

Well, listen, let's face it. It's quite cathartic for me because I've never told anyone before. I'm also telling you because if you're a Christian young person here today, growing up, having grown up in a well-adjusted Christian family, you don't know how fortunate you are.

[15 : 16] And I'm telling you that from first-hand experience. You don't know how fortunate you are to have grown up in a well-adjusted Christian family. I'm telling you because my dear father, whom I love to high heaven, and I still respect and honor every single day of my life, is an example of what every single person is in Glasgow today, especially alpha males.

We are weak, vulnerable, and fragile, every single one of us. And the alpha males among us are often the weakest of them all. In public, they pretend strength.

But behind closed doors, they drink and cuss and cry. They are just as broken as the next man. And perhaps that's you today.

Perhaps that's you. You're struggling to hold it all together, to wear that strong mask, to pretend to self-sufficiency, but you know that inside, you are a proper mess.

Good word for you visitors today. Good Scottish word. Boorach. It means mess of messes. You're a proper boorach on the inside. You're a bruised reed with a battered heart.

[16 : 30] And you think to yourself, well, these Christians, they have it all together. They seem well adjusted. No, no, and no again.

Jesus Christ is drawn to bruised reeds like you and me, and trust me, I am more bruised than you will ever know. Christianity might be for strong people, but Jesus Christ is for the broken, the weakened, those who are right on the edge of giving up.

The important thing is this. Admit your weakness to yourself and to Jesus. You don't have to admit it to me. You admit it to yourself and to Jesus.

Admit to him that you're bruised and broken, weary and worn down. Admit to him you're a mess. Behind closed doors, drinks and cusses and cries.

You see, Jesus isn't for the strong and the self-reliant. He's for the weak and the bruised. Take off that mask you're wearing. It doesn't suit you. Stop pretending. We're bruised, reads every one of us.

[17 : 45] And that's fine and good. Because you know what? It's only when you know that you are weak that Jesus can never make you strong.

Christ's people are all weak. We're all bruised, reads. Second, Christ and his peace.

Christ and his peace. What's the nature of your bruise today? What is it, or rather, what are those collections of things which are contributing to your weakness and to your brokenness?

Grief, perhaps. Loneliness, perhaps. Fear, insecurity. Depression, anxiety. Despair, boredom. Exhaustion over work. Guilt, shame. Low self-esteem. Mental fog. Are others enforcing their merciless standards upon you?

[18 : 43] I feel so sorry for our teenagers, especially girls, who are tormented mercilessly by the standards of social media.

enslaved by the fictional standards of beauty. Fantasy standards of popularity. Addicted to social media.

They must check their accounts. But all the time, feeding what they'll see or not see. But what's true for teenagers, you know, is true for us all, especially alpha males.

The world squeezes us into its mold and forces us to conform. Social standards of behavior drive us to pretending fulfillment while all the time gazing into the nothingness of despair.

Yes, and there's no refuge for the bruised reed in this world. You know what they say? Laugh and the whole world laughs with you. Cry, and you cry all alone.

[19 : 49] Your prodigal son had many friends when he was rich. But when he was bruised, he was all by himself. So what is the nature of your bruise today? And you've all got one, I know you do.

Or perhaps you're not so bruised by the things you have done as the person you have become. You hate the way you are. You've been ground down by the world around you.

And sometimes someone will say to you, look, stop trying to be like that. Just be yourself. But you say to them, don't you see? It's myself that's the problem.

It's who I am. That's shame. And you're turning your friends out by your incessant low mood. You have started your own pity party where you're your only guest because no one wants to be with you.

Well, the man in this story, the man with the withered hand, knew all about being bruised. The society in which he lived superstitiously believed that he had been condemned to disability by God.

[20 : 57] He must have done something very sinful indeed to have deserved such a thing. He's been cursed by God with a withered hand. It's his karma. Don't go looking for pity.

You won't find any. No compassionate voices anywhere. Just that judgmental look which says to you, you deserve everything you get in this world, boy.

So again, I ask you the question, what is bruising you today? You know, I regret that I never had the opportunity to have a grown-up conversation with my dad.

About what had broken him so profoundly. Sometimes, when I go up to Gospy, I stand at his grave and say, Dad, what was it? Let's be honest.

There are nearly 200 of us in this building this morning. And each of us has our own variety of brokenness and bruising. Only you know the ways in which you're broken.

[21 : 58] I don't know them. But this I do know. Every one of us is broken in our own way. And every one of us try to deal with that brokenness in his or her own way.

You know that some turn to drink not to solve their problems. They're not dumb enough to think that drink will solve their problems. They drink because it dulls the pain in their hearts.

Others turn to work and career to overwhelm the noises in their heads with what they think will be an even greater noise of busyness. Still others choose the telly, material possessions, exotic holidays, risky sports, psychotherapy, yes, even religion.

There are millions of people in our world today who try to deal with their brokenness by doing things for God. Be it Christian or Hindu or whoever.

But in our verse it says of Jesus a bruised reed he will not break. Now surely this tells us just how gently Jesus deals with us.

[23 : 08] He doesn't chide us. He doesn't judge us for our weakness and our brokenness. You're going through a hard time right now.

You think Jesus is looking down whose nose at you in judgment? Think again. You got the wrong Jesus. He didn't look down his nose at this man with a withered hand and treat him like a social pariah.

He deals with us ever so gently. So gently yet so efficiently. He doesn't shout in our ears like a drill sergeant or a drunk man behind closed doors.

He doesn't snap our bones like a chiropractor. He doesn't shock us with electroconvulsive therapy. So very quietly so very gently yet so very strongly he deals with us ensuring that he never breaks that which is bruised.

You know in common with every planet every person on planet earth you have bruised heart. And perhaps that's why you're here this morning. What can this church possibly do to deal with you that nothing else can?

[24 : 24] And the answer to that question is that this church can offer you nothing to deal with your brokenness. This church can offer you nothing but what we can do is point you to a Jesus.

In fact we will lead you to a Jesus who with great tenderness and love and gentleness will bind up your broken heart and make you whole again. Listen I don't have all the answers to your questions. I don't have the solutions to your problem but I know where you can find them. You can find them in Jesus Christ. I don't have the strength you need to go on but I know who does Jesus Christ.

I can't give you a new heart. I can't give you a new outlook in life. Neither can this church but I know who can Jesus Christ. Pity the likes of Jesse Ventura who proudly says they don't need a crutch because they don't have weak minds.

For in their pride they deny themselves the opportunity to encounter the Lord Jesus Christ in whom is all love and all hope and all forgiveness. I do not offer you a system of thought today.

[25 : 31] I do not offer you a thing today. Don't offer you a program today. I offer you a person. Jesus Christ the Jesus who will not break you but build you the Jesus who will not destroy you but delight you who will not condemn you but forgive you.

Lastly and very briefly Christ and his passion. Christ and his passion. I will very well you say to me. You will grudgingly admit to me okay I'm bruised and I'm broken on the inside and I see the reason and appeal in what you say preacher.

I want what the gospel has to offer. I want the peace and the wholeness of Christ's grace but what nags at me is this I live in a cosmopolitan city with a thousand different religions.

What makes Jesus any different from the other great religions of our time? Why do you see comfort and support in him? I'm not in secular atheism or not in the gods of another religion.

Perhaps over the years you'll have heard the expression it takes one to know one. It takes one to know one. You only ever really know what a person's going through if you yourself have gone through that same thing before.

[26 : 53] Only then can you fully sympathize with that person. So the question then becomes what does Jesus Christ know about being bruised and broken such that he can sympathize with us in our deep heart pain and give us his peace and comfort?

What does he know? What does Jesus know more than the founders of all the other great religions or the gods to which people bow down or the atheism which people are proud to repress about pain?

Have you read the gospels? Do you know the story of Jesus Christ and how his life was nothing but suffering rejection and brokenness? One biblical scholar calls these four gospels passion narratives with an extended narrative instead of introduction rather passion narratives with an extended

introduction.

More than half of these Bible books Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are given over to the last week of Jesus' earthly life where he was bruised and broken beyond anything we can understand or imagine beaten betrayed humiliated crucified executed does anyone know better what it means to be a bruised reed than Jesus of Nazareth the man of whom it said he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief?

have you been beaten like Jesus was beaten? Have you been betrayed like he was or broken like he was?

[28 : 29] Have you been left alone and abandoned by those closest to you like he was? Have you ever been stripped naked paraded before jeering crowds and then crucified have you?

the question stops being what does Jesus know about being a bruised reed to in the light of all that Jesus suffered what do I know about being a bruised reed but the point is this whatever you're going through today Jesus knows it understands it he experienced and sympathised with us in all our bruising he became weaker than the weakest of us on the cross the greatest of all nothings the loneliest of all men he knows exactly how you feel if you should come to Jesus with all your brokenness today he will look at you with understanding eyes and his heart will go out to you with compassion and sympathy well the church can't promise you such sympathy because the church is made up of sinful men and women like me but Jesus can and Jesus does and he promises us saying come to me all that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest oh no one understands brokenness like Jesus does no one can sympathise with him like with you like he can yes and with this we close

Jesus is no pathetic victim of abuse never was for us and for our salvation he subjected himself to the breaking and the bruising for the forgiveness of our sins and to give us eternal life he sacrificed himself unto the cruelty of the cross and because on the third day he rose from the dead he assures us that there is light at the end of the tunnel that through faith in him our beauty shall be exchanged for that our brokenness shall be exchanged for beauty and that are damaged by the light what can this Jesus offer us more than he already has poor Jesse Ventura he better have time to bleed who can offer him anything close to the Jesus that he turns his back on when Jesse Ventura is broken will he not fall down but we have

Jesus do we not you know the change came in my father's life listen especially to this alpha males you tough guys like me you never cry the change came in my father's life when he admitted to himself and to God his own weakness and he believed in Jesus for strength and salvation and he committed himself to a Jesus who sympathized with him and saved him from his sins Jesus won't break a bruised reed we're all broken in our own ways will you come now by faith to Jesus for sympathy and salvation there's a gentle savior waiting for you so will you come let us pray father I want to confess that if I broke in that commandment to honor your father and mother that you would forgive me for that but I do give you thanks

Lord that in those last few weeks of his life my father's heart was changed by you Lord we know that all of us are broken and bruised in our own ways and especially those who pretend to be the toughest and the hardest and the most immune those who don't cry that they're often the weakest of the lot of them and so Lord help us to admit to ourselves change our hearts that we may be open to the sound of your gospel we ask these things in Jesus name Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen