

Matthew 12:15-21

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[0:00] Well, good morning.

For those of you I don't know, my name is Dave. I'm one of Shoreline's pastors. And I invite you to open God's word with me to Matthew chapter 12. If you don't have a Bible today, we have some on the back table.

They're already bookmarked to today's passage. And as you turn there, you'll see that this passage centers on a quote from Isaiah chapter 42.

The prophet Isaiah wrote these words hundreds of years before Christ was born. And Matthew, in verse 17, tells us today that it is Jesus who fulfilled them.

So read with me today, Matthew chapter 12, starting in verse 15. Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there, and many followed him, and he healed them all, and ordered them not to make him known.

[1:19] 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.

What is it that Jesus fulfilled? And why does Matthew want us to hear this news?

It is my prayer today that the answer to those questions will comfort you, and challenge you, and ultimately create in you a sense of awe and of worship, this great servant and king.

[2:29] Let's pray. Amen. Father, in these next moments, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

We pray that in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Our passage begins today in verse 15, where we read that Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there.

But that this is pointing back to last week, when the Pharisees used the Sabbath, which should be received as a gift from God, as a weapon to trap and accuse Jesus.

Now, not only did he put their arguments to shame, but he made bold claims about himself, that he was greater than the temple, that he was the Lord of the Sabbath, and he backed that up by a healing miracle on the Sabbath.

Instead of heeding his words, repenting and believing in him, they doubled down on their opposition and plotted to destroy him. And this is what Jesus knew.

[3:50] This is what he was aware of and withdrew from there. He could have kept on dismantling their arguments. He could have called down fire from heaven. He could have done any number of things, but he chose instead to walk away.

And this is telling, where did the people go? They didn't follow the Pharisees.

They followed Jesus. 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. Now, what is being fulfilled here? I think our natural inclination is to see, and he healed them all, at the end of verse 15, and think that's what's being fulfilled.

After all, that's what Messiahs do, right? They come and save us from things. And, in fact, we've seen that idea before. If you turn back to chapter 8, Jesus healed many people.

[5:04] 815 says, He touched her hand, and the fever left her. And she rose and began to serve him. That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out spirits with the word and healed all who were sick.

And Matthew explicitly ties that to Isaiah 53. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah. He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.

So it would make sense to us. And I think our natural assumption is that when we see that Jesus is healing, that we would say, oh, he's healing again. That's what's being fulfilled here in this prophecy from Isaiah.

This time, Isaiah 42. I don't think that's what Matthew is trying to show us. Look at the quote, verses 18 to 21.

These verses that Matthew quotes, they don't mention healing one time. Instead, Isaiah introduces to us a servant.

[6:10] And the themes of the servant's work are not healing, but justice. He will proclaim justice. He will bring justice. The themes are gentleness, a bruised reed he will not break, a smoldering lick he will not quench.

The themes are the Gentiles, that is, the nations. At the end of both verse 18 and verse 21, Isaiah expects that the servant's work will one day benefit the whole world. And in the center of Matthew's quote, verse 19, at its very heart, what do we see?

We see that the servant will have a kind of quietness, a kind of modesty or humility, which, again, pairs well with the servant's gentleness.

I do not think that Matthew wants us to see the healings and think that those are the center and connect that to Isaiah's prophecy.

Instead, I think he wants us to look at verse 15, where Jesus chooses to withdraw instead of debating. And verse 16, where he orders the crowds to silence instead of celebration.

[7:22] And to see that the Lord is fulfilling, verse 19. He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. Jesus fulfilled Isaiah 42 when he chose silence and humility and modesty.

Our Savior came not with great fanfare, but with great modesty. Not with pomp and pride, but with humility. At the end of the last chapter, he said, take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly of heart.

And you will find rest for your souls. So this fits his person. And it fits his ways. And it fits his mission.

And if we will see that, we will start to see his beauty. And we will love him. And the love that he forms in our hearts will begin to shape us anew, so that we will follow in his steps.

So let us look at this servant that Isaiah taught the world to wait for. Isaiah wrote. He ministered probably somewhere between 740 B.C. and 700 B.C.

[8:50] So this is hundreds of years before Christ. Among his many prophecies and calls to the people are what have become known as the four servant songs.

They appear in Isaiah chapters 42, 49, 50, and the famous climax, Isaiah chapter 53. And so this is the first of the four servant songs.

And it is nine verses long in Isaiah, and Matthew here quotes the first four verses. What is the song about? It is the Lord speaking, and he introduces his servant.

Now, we would normally think of a prophet like Isaiah as the servant of the Lord, but this is a different kind of servant. One Isaiah himself needs to be introduced to. And perhaps without knowing it, we have already been introduced to this servant.

And at the end of Matthew chapter 3, and I think we'll have that up here, we saw at Jesus' baptism something that remarkably resembles Isaiah's prophecy.

[10:07] Matthew 3, 16 and 17. When Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him.

And he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him. And behold, a voice from heaven said, This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Now, the word servant does not appear in Matthew 3.

But the connections, well, we can't miss them. In chapter 12, Matthew quotes Isaiah as the Lord calls the servant, My beloved. And at his baptism, the Father said, This is my beloved Son. In chapter 12, the Lord calls the servant, The one with whom my soul is well pleased. And at his baptism, the Father calls Jesus, The one with whom I am well pleased.

In chapter 12, Matthew quotes Isaiah as the Lord says, I will put my Spirit upon him. And at his baptism, he went up from the water. And behold, the heavens were opened to him.

[11:11] And he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him. On top of all those connections, we've already said today as well, that in Matthew chapter 8, Matthew connects Christ's healing ministry to the last of the servant's songs.

So verse 18 has shown us that we are to understand that Jesus is the servant, this great servant that Isaiah expects, wants us to expect.

Well, what now? It's not a game of where's Waldo. There's a point to it. Matthew wants us to see the servant's ministry coming to fruition in Jesus.

And it happens in verses 19 to 21. In verse 19, we see that he will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.

In verse 20, we see that a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench. And then in verses 20 and 21, we see this idea of justice and victory and the Gentiles, that is the nations.

[12:22] I'm going to do this a little bit out of order. We're going to start in verse 20 and see who it is that the servant serves. And then we'll go back to verse 19 and see what he does not do.

And finally, we'll end in 20 and 21 and see what he does. So first, verse 20.

Who is it that this servant serves? A bruised reed he will not break, on a smoldering wick he will not quench.

Now, this is not really a familiar picture to us. The only reed you may have experience with might be in the clarinet your mom made you play in fifth grade band, right?

And you may know what moisture wicking sports apparel is, but not really know what a smoldering wick is, and what any of that might have to do with Christ. A reed is a water plant.

[13:32] It's long and hollow stock. It is very fragile. Here's how one writer put it. A reed might be used as a flute, as a measuring rod, as a pen, many other ways.

Reeds grew plentifully and were cheap. The natural thing was to discard an imperfect reed and replace it with a better one. A reed was already a very fragile thing, and a bruised, bent, or broken one, well, that hung by a thread.

And it was considered disposable. A diamond does it. I wonder if that's how you feel today.

Damaged or fragile. Hanging by a thread.

Disposable to this world. Now, the Lord doesn't make a distinction about how the bruised reed got that way, does he? It's not as if some bruises he'll be tender with and others he won't.

The reed may have been battered down by others. Abuse and insults and betrayal. It may have been blown over in a storm. Sickness and setbacks.

[14:46] It may have harmed itself. Foolishness and addiction. Sin. Sin. He makes no qualification. Every bruised reed, no matter how it got that way, he will not break.

What an encouragement. And what of the wick? Well, so too of the smoldering wick. This is a picture of a flickering lamp. The flame is out and the glowing wick merely gives off smoke.

One writer put it that way. The lamp is out of fuel and only the wick remains burning. Are you depleted? Are you running on empty?

Have you reached the end of yourself? In one sense, I hope you have. And in another sense, I hope you haven't.

First, I hope that you have. I hope that you see yourself as a broken reed and a smoldering wick, because it is only the person who realizes they have no stature, no qualification to stand before the living God, who will cry out for his mercy and who will receive it.

[16:01] No one will stride into heaven on the back of their own accomplishments and merits. That's the one that Jesus will break.

Only by turning from self and sin, repenting at the foot of Christ's cross, will we find an entrance into his merits, so that his victory is ours.

He will not turn away the humble heart that cries for mercy. So I do hope you've found the end of yourself.

He does not mind that you are weak. The great Puritan Thomas Watson said, a weak faith can lay hold of a strong Christ.

Amen. Amen. But there's another sense in which I hope you haven't found yourself broken, battered, empty. In this life, we face so many trials.

[17:06] And if that is where you are, whether you are a broken reed because others have battered you with words or fists or betrayal or worse, Jesus says, I will not break you.

You are welcome here. And if you are broken because of a storm, if calamity has struck you, your work or your home or your body, Jesus says, I will not break you.

Find your rest in me. And if you are a broken reed because of yourself, if you are living through the grief of your own foolishness, or paying the penalties of your own sin, or feeling so broken and polluted by sin that you can't believe the Lord would ever have you, Jesus says, I will not break you.

Find forgiveness in me. And whether you are a smoldering wick because your reservoir is just too small, and you've been asked to do more than your capacity, Jesus says, I will not snuff you out.

My yoke is easy. And whether you're a smoldering wick because you've had to burn too hot, and the pace has been too quick, with so much to do that you've had to burn more oil than you can bear, or whether you're a smoldering wick because there's a hole in your reservoir, and someone's been stealing your fuel, Jesus says, I will not snuff you out.

[18:41] My burden is light. Do you find yourself offensive, perhaps?

Flax giving off nothing but choking smoke and no light. Here is one who came as a servant not to be served, but to serve you.

Do you find yourself worthless? A broken reed is good for nothing. A smoldering wick? Disposable. But here is one who takes notice of you, even you.

Come ye sinners, poor and needy, weak and wounded, sick and sore. Jesus ready, stands to save you, full of pity, love, and power.

All the fitness he requires is to feel your need of him. When Charles Spurgeon preached this passage, here's the encouragement he gave.

[20:01] Do not say you are good for nothing. You shall sing up in heaven yet. Do not say you are worthless. At last, you shall stand before the throne among the blood-washed company and shall sing God's praise.

Spurgeon is pointing us to the future glory set for us in Christ. And I gladly commend that hope to you. And I also want you to walk in a present reality, not just in a future hope, but today.

If you belong to Christ, you have a source of life and joy and peace and value even now. Christ has come and he has made you his own.

He has promised never to leave you or forsake you. So cast your cares on him for he cares for you. Even this day, even this moment, walk with him and in the fiercest storm he will shield and guard the most fragile weed.

Why will he do this? Why won't he crush you? Why will he bind up the broken, the battered, and the bruised?

[21:23] What does the Lord call his servant in verse 18? What did the Father call him at his baptism? He called him beloved.

Now guess what? In Christ. That title becomes yours. When Christ saves you, he wraps his arms around you so that the scriptures say you are in Christ, which is how his death can substitute for yours.

You are united to Christ, which is how his righteousness can be yours. You are united to Christ, which is how his resurrection can secure yours.

You are united to Christ, which is how his high status, beloved of the Father, can be yours. You are united to Christ.

And that's exactly the testimony of the Bible. Hosea chapter 2, Romans 11, Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, 2 Thessalonians 2, and more.

[22:38] That is the name that God gives his redeemed people, beloved of God. The Lord calls us his beloved because we are united to Christ, because we are united to this servant who is loved by God.

Why won't he crush the reed, quench the wick? Why will he support and uphold them? He has drawn us to himself, wrapped us in his arms, made us his own, made us his beloved.

That is who he is. That is who he has come to serve. And now verse 19 shows us the manner in which he did it.

Here is how he did it, the attitude and the affect with which he came. Verse 19 says, he will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.

I think we have seen that in this passage, right? In verse 15, he does not quarrel. He walks away from the Pharisees. And then in verse 16, he quiets the crowds.

[24:05] Not with pomp and circumstance, but with humility comes our Savior. He does not cry aloud in the streets. Let's think for a moment what that means about Christ.

In the wonderful parenting book, Give Them Grace, the authors draw out this idea from this passage. The modesty that we see in the beloved son's life is a refusal to show off or insist that everyone give him his due.

He didn't proclaim his greatness in the streets. He didn't show off. He restrained himself. He didn't need our approval or praise. He had nothing to prove and he lived humbly because he loved us and never showed off.

I hope this picture of modesty and service and humility draws you to him.

I hope it makes Christ beautiful to you. As one commentator put it, God's answer to the oppressors of the world is not more oppression, nor is his answer to arrogance more arrogance.

[25:36] Rather, in quietness, humility, and simplicity, he will take all of the evil into himself and return only grace.

That is power. first, I hope that truth settles deep in your heart and prompts you to worship.

Our king is not selfish. He came in humility and love. And second, as it settles in our heart, I hope it changes our hearts because it testifies against our own immodesty.

Immodesty in our dress and in our speech and in our possessions and in our behavior, showing off. What is that? It's us looking for ways to be celebrated.

When we dress to show off our bodies, we're trying to be desired. When we always turn conversation to ourselves, we're looking to be the center of attention. When we show off our possessions, we're hoping to be envied.

[26:50] When we behave in such a way that everyone looks at us, we're trying to be the life of the party. When good church people like us practice our righteousness before men, making sure everyone knows how holy we are, we're trying to be celebrated for our moral superiority.

And if you remember back to chapter 6, Jesus has already told us that when we do those things, whatever accolades we can accumulate, well, that's it. We've already received our reward in full. Why do we desire to be celebrated in all those ways and act out accordingly, boastfully, pridefully? because deep down, we want validation that we don't think we have. Maybe we want people in general to affirm us.

Maybe we want someone in particular to validate us. Maybe we want to prove something to ourselves. Maybe it's out of great pride and we want to strut around like peacocks.

[28:10] Maybe it's out of desperation. We want, we know that we are bruised reeds and wicks about to blow out and we want someone, anyone, to notice us before we've been extinguished.

Whatever drives our need for validation, if this humble servant has served us and given us the title beloved of God.

Friends, we can be free from the unending need to be validated. Do we need anyone else's approval, even our own?

No. There's no better title. There's no higher status. There's nothing more that we could achieve. when Jesus says, I will give you rest, I think a great part of that is rest from the endless search for approval.

[29:15] When we have his love, we can say, I don't need to be celebrated in my body, in my conversations, in my neighborhood, at work, in the church, because no one in this world can give me a title like the one the great servant has purchased for me, beloved of the Father.

And so we look forward to the completion of his ministry. And let's look to that. Look with me at the end of verse 20.

He says something different, unexpected. He will do all these things until he brings justice to victory. And in his name, the Gentiles will hope. We see here two ideas. First is God's justice, and the second is the promises of God coming to the whole world, that is the Gentiles, the nations hoping in him.

God's Now, we can say an incredible number of things about those two topics, but I want to show you just one. And what I want to show you is the connection between them.

[30:37] They sit side by side here, and they can just look like things on a list, but they are not just two items on a list. They are tightly connected, and here is why.

The biblical idea of justice is a very expansive term. We tend to think of justice in pretty narrow categories.

We tend to think of criminal justice, or economic justice, or social justice, and we tend to think of our participation in those things in kind of performative terms.

What I mean by that is we think we've kind of done justice when we've voted for the right person. We've done justice. Or we've shared the right thing on social media. It's kind of a performance, not something that we are integrated into.

Justice, biblically conceived, is the right rule of God among his people. Justice is where people put away their own evil, where they learn to do good to others, where they know the cause of the downtrodden in their midst, the oppressed, the fatherless, the widow, and serve them, and where they rightly worship God.

[31:54] It is a broad and expansive and life-filling idea. There are two things to note about what he says here about God's justice.

First, it says, he, that is the servant, will bring it about. This is not something that you and I can accomplish in this world. The Lord will destroy the works of the devil, perfect his kingdom, and rescue those who trust in him.

And also, we can see here there's this until idea. This is a future reality, but, friends, hear me, this does not get us off the hook. We can't look to this and say, oh yeah, he'll take care of that someday. We don't have anything to do with this. Because there is a place where God's right rule ought to already reign.

His church. The church is not a club for Christians.

[33:02] It is an embassy from heaven. And we are commanded to reflect God's justice among the people of God.

The just rule of Christ, which will one day flood the whole earth, lives here. What does that look like?

It means that Christ is rightly worshipped among his people. It looks like we are commanded not to show partiality. It looks like we bear one another's burdens.

And that's the connection between the justice and the hope of the nations. Because that, the right rule of Christ and his church, is the salt and the light to the world.

Jesus said, by this, all people will know that you are my disciples. That is, we are a compelling, drawing community if you love one another.

[34:19] I know some of you share burdens with your brothers and sisters in Christ that no one else would share unless they already had that wonderful, affirming title, beloved of God, that nothing can unseat.

So we can risk sharing great burdens. And you've told me that you find great comfort and compassion from your church family that you can find nowhere else.

And I've heard stories, and I've been the recipient of great acts of kindness in our church family. Perhaps you have too.

and some of you have told me how your non-Christian friends, and this is the connection, right, who don't know the community of Christ are amazed at how your church family really is a family to you.

That's the connection between justice and the nations hoping in Christ. God's right rule, which is something that he will one day enact universally, ought to be a present reality in his church.

[35:41] And that compelling community is a light to the world. So friends, will you throw yourselves into the life of the church for your good, for his glory, and as a light to the nations.

And let our participation in the church show that fear has been cast out of us, that we are open and vulnerable and loving and serving in ways the world does not know.

If we're just another club, well, that's not a light to the nations, and the justice of God won't make the nations hope in Christ. John MacArthur put it this way, a church that is just like the world has nothing to offer the world.

may we, in relying the supernatural power of God, risk being a real church family.

So we have seen that Jesus is the long awaited servant, that he will receive any broken person, and they will inherit his title, beloved, so that we can follow his example of modest humility, and that the supernatural reign of God is a present reality in the church, and that draws people around the world to Christ, to cause them to trust in him.

[37:31] What can be our response? if you turn back to Isaiah 42, Isaiah ends his servant song with a response, with a reply, and he says, sing to the Lord a new song, his praise from the end of the earth.

You who go down to the sea and all that fills it, the coastlands and their inhabitants, let the deserts and its cities lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar inhabits. Let the inhabitants of Selah sing for joy.

Let them shout from the top of the mountains. Let them give glory to the Lord and declare his praise in the coastlands. If this does not prompt us to joy in the Lord and celebration and worship, we haven't heard it.

friends, I hope that you have been prompted to love this great servant. Let's pray.

Father in heaven, thank you that you have sent your son as a servant. not to crush, but to bind up and heal all the brokenhearted who would come to him.

[39:10] Thank you that you bestow upon us this wonderful family title, beloved. Lord, will you help us to follow in his example of modest humility as we rest in that title, as we rest in that status and position.

And Lord, will that prompt us to live out fully the supernatural reign, your supernatural reign in our church. And may that wonderful, compelling community draw others to trust in the servant. In whose name we pray. Amen.