

Jesus's Way

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[0 : 00] Well, if you turn back to the passage Mark just read for us in Matthew 12, 15 to 21, you didn't hear the first part of the answer on adoption, which was utterly brilliant.

I defy anyone to give a better one. She began her first, the first word of her answer was technically. She gave a technical definition, then she gave two exceptions, and then she said, and this is what it's really like.

Yeah, that's Sunday school. After church today, we're all going downstairs. I'm having a conflict in the office right now.

One of the people on staff has a Lego Jesus. And I've taken to torturing the Lego Jesus in my vain attempt to say to this person, give up on your plastic Jesus.

It's all very good humor. I just, I'm telling you this. But the more I do it, the more prominent place Lego Jesus takes. And there's been a multiplication.

[1 : 07] Now there are two Jesuses, plastic Jesuses in the office. The reason I'm saying that is because our passage today gives us an absolutely perfect portrait of Jesus. It's such a happy and hopeful passage.

And such a contrast to where we finished last week in verse 14. If you look down, you remember? The religious lay leaders up in Galilee seriously begin planning to murder Jesus, to execute him. You know, Jesus has disobeyed the fourth commandment in their opinion. So they're going to break the sixth commandment to fix things. And it's the first direct reference, overt reference to Jesus' death in all the gospel.

And our passage starts verse 15. Jesus withdraws and heals everyone. Not because he's lacking courage. But the reality of his death reveals what his real ministry and mission is all about.

So in Matthew's gospel, just so you know, every now and again Jesus withdraws from conflict. All the way up until he goes to Jerusalem in chapter 21. Where he knows it's come his time to die.

[2 : 20] And as his death approaches, he goes into the temple and he preaches the gospel with great controversy. But he never looks for conflict. He will push back on self-righteous religious bullies.

He will push back on people who are arrogant enough to think they can be spiritually neutral towards him. But here he is avoiding premature confrontation.

His work is not yet done. He's not come to be a controversialist. And I think it's worth pointing out that this is something that all of us struggle with, with Jesus. He always breaks our expectations and remakes our expectations.

Because he cannot, he'll never be a prisoner to my tiny imagination of what he ought to be. And the question is why? What is it about him? Why does he do the things that he does?

Why does he do them in the way that he does them? I mean, why did he escalate last week and withdraw this week? Why does he heal the people who come to him, but not all the people in it?

[3 : 19] Why does he not act in the way that we expect him to? And in answer, Matthew gives us the longest quote in all of his gospel. You can see it down from verse 18 to 21.

It's the longest quote from the book of Isaiah. And it is the direct speech of God himself speaking through the prophet Isaiah about Jesus Christ. And these words explain who, in God's view, who Jesus is, what he's going to do, and how he's going to do it.

It comes from the book of Isaiah. And it is the first of four songs in Isaiah about this character called the servant. All four of them are about Jesus.

And to be truthful with you, they're not just God speaking about his servant. It would be more accurate to say that God is singing about his servant.

I don't know whether you think about God in that way. It's like the things that God wants to communicate are so happy and joyful and full of delight, he breaks into song. If you look down in verse 18, this pleasure comes right from God's soul.

[4 : 28] Isn't that astonishing? Now, if you've been a Christian for five years or so, you'll be very familiar with these words from Christmas time. But I point out that what's very striking about them is how profoundly relational they are.

I mean, you can come to church and observe God and observe others. You can go to Bible study and even observe God without it changing your relationships, without your relationships being really touched.

But that's not Christianity. Christianity is profoundly, irreducibly, wonderfully, essentially relational because of who God is. God reveals himself as one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And they work together in joy for our salvation. And our salvation, my friends, is rooted in the relationships between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So I just want to look very quickly with you at this beautiful little section and ask the question, who does God sing Jesus is?

[5 : 32] Who does he say he is? What's he going to do and how's he going to do it? They're the three points. And you'll notice the first one focuses on the Father and the second on the Holy Spirit and the third on Jesus himself.

It's just, it's a remarkable little section. So number one, who is Jesus in God the Father's song here? And you can sense the joy of God in Jesus right from the start.

He says, verse 18, Behold my servant. God wants us to look and behold Jesus. In the Hebrew in Isaiah 42, it's literally, Hey, look at him.

Have you ever imagined anything like him? Because we cannot understand Jesus fully from his miracles or from his teaching or from his normal family relationships.

Jesus belongs fundamentally to God. God says, He is my servant. All that he is doing is for me, which is very, very reassuring.

[6 : 35] See, because if Jesus has come to save us from our sins, what a wonderful and terrific thing that is. But he's come to save us from our sins, not just because he loves us, but because he loves his heavenly Father.

He hasn't just come to serve us. He's come to serve us as a way of serving his heavenly Father. That means Jesus is doubly committed to our welfare for our sake and for the sake of his Father. I'll tell you what else it means. It means that servanthood does not demean you. This is the basic posture of the Christian life. But historically, it's never been a popular thing to say, I serve other people.

And today we're so prickly and concerned about our massive personal rights that even talking about serving is difficult, just so long as it doesn't affect my huge dignity. But when God the Son serves the Father, it does not make him in any way inferior or less divine.

Just so, when we serve each other, we are more like him. This is who Jesus is. This is who Jesus is. And God the Father's joy. It's not just that he's going to serve, but in who he is.

[7 : 39] You see verse 18. He says, I've chosen him for myself, my beloved, with whom I'm well pleased. This is the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

The tri-unity of God. One God, three persons. Now, you know that you can search the Bible. You'll never find the word Trinity in the Bible. But it's a great summary of what the Bible teaches.

And it means this. That God has eternally past and will eternally future enjoy friendship, communion and fellowship and love even before he created the world.

That has massive implications for us. It means, for example, that love comes first. If the three persons of the Trinity have known each other and loved each other for eternity past, then it means that love comes before the creation of the world.

If you just have a unipersonal God, not three in one, it means power comes first, creates the world, and then he might love people.

[8 : 47] But since there is a triune God, there is joy and love and giving to the equal. And that's at the foundation of reality. And the tri-personal God has experienced perfect love and community for all eternity.

And it's out of that love he has created the world. He's created us in his image to know him and to love him, as we sang earlier, teaches how to love each other. And it just means relationships are terribly, terribly important.

Relationships, I know you're not going to... Relationships are more important than accumulating wealth or status or power. And it is out of that love of the Father with the Son that he comes to serve us.

And in his serving, he and God the Father and God the Holy Spirit bring us back into sharing the perfect love and community that they've shared for all eternity. It's just...

It's astonishing. That's who the servant is, number one. Number two, what will he do? Now, I discovered between the two services that Dan went to sleep in my second point.

[9 : 54] Sorry, it's true. Isn't it true? Well, sir. What did you actually say to me? I collapsed the first... Collapsed. He collapsed.

Yeah. So what is the servant going to do? So I just... If he looks like sleeping, just put your hand up, someone. Just... No, no, no.

Dan, sleep away. That's fine. No. So what will the servant do? Well, the servant's going to do two things. But look, if you look in verse 18, the first thing the Father says is, I'll put my spirit upon him. Now, the spirit comes upon Jesus because he's going to do something utterly beyond human understanding. So this is the baptism. The baptism of Jesus was not just a lovely liturgical moment. When Jesus was baptized, he saw the heavens opened. They remain open. And the spirit descending on him like a dove and resting on him. And the spirit comes and permanently remains on Jesus, not just to empower him for ministry, for this great thing that he's going to do, but to make sure that heaven and earth still connect with each other.

[11 : 07] And what's he going to do? There are two things. Verse 18, he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. And verse 20, he will bring justice to victory. We throw this word justice around all the time.

This is much more than legal justice. This is much more than just finding the dead bodies and giving redress to victims. It's more than just putting things right. It's more than meeting out punishment. This has to do with the righteous character of God's greatest good. This has to do with what we desire and the desire of nations. And it is fundamentally relational.

It is relational righteousness. So when you ask, what does it mean Jesus proclaims justice? Well, just think about some of the things we've seen in Matthew already. When Jesus says, blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

He's proclaiming justice. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are you when you are persecuted for my name's sake. He's proclaiming relational justice.

[12 : 10] Or whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment. Or turn the other cheek. Or love your enemies. Or enter by the narrow gate.

Not everyone who calls me Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven. This is relational justice. The son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins. He's proclaiming this justice. But he'll do more.

He will bring the justice to victory, to success. And the words indicate a massive struggle against evil. Because the work of overturning evil and establishing what is good is going to take absolutely everything the servant has.

And he is going to overturn evil by serving, by giving his life. Not by conquering all, but by becoming the great victim.

He's going to take the consequences of my pride and my violence and my arrogance and fragmentation of all the relationships that there are into himself. He has not come to be served, but to serve.

[13 : 12] And to give his life as a ransom for us. And he will succeed. He will bring this to victory. Restoration of relation to God and to each other across any lines.

It's not going to come by law enforcement. It's not going to come by political power or self-improvement or mindfulness, all of which are good. It's brought by the servant of God. And he's not come to make us happy individuals.

He's not come to make me on my own so that I can manage my emotions or carefully curate my self-image by social media. He's restoring us in relation with each other and with himself.

And he will bring justice because of who he is. The servant, the one beloved, the one in whom God's soul delights. The one on whom the Holy Spirit has come. That is what he's come to do. Number three. How's he going to do it? And this is the focus of the passage. This is astonishing stuff.

[14:17] Verses 19 and 20. God the Father says basically two things about the way the servant is going to work. Verse 19. The way he's going to work. Number one is with humility.

He will not quarrel or cry aloud. Nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. No fanfare. No shouting matches. No arrogance or bloated claims. No fake self-importance or double speak. No ad campaign and carefully manicured image.

He will not abuse. He will not dehumanize. He will not degrade any of us. Do you know a lot of people think that all we need to do as a church is we need to make some sort of big splash out there in the community.

You know a showy demonstration of numbers or voters a block and that'll make a change. But the ministry of the servant is one that doesn't advance by shouting or by numbers or violence or brawling.

[15:15] Because his ministry is about restoration, about the renewal of relationships, about the dignity and joy and power of what is true and right. And the way the servant works is by humility.

Number one. And second. The way the servant works is with broken people. Verse 20. A bruised reed he will not break and a smoldering wick he will not quench.

This has to be one of the most astonishing statements by God in all the Bible. This is a picture of spiritually damaged and vulnerable people.

And if you don't think that's you, you don't know anything. It's all of us. You see a reed was used for musical instruments or for measuring things or for a pen for writing things.

And when you bend a reed, it doesn't bend back. It bruises in the middle. And if a reed is bruised, it's completely useless. It's cheap.

[16:18] They're plentiful. It's easy just to throw it away and replace it with something else. A smoldering wick on a candle is a sputtering, smoky-smelling nuisance.

It might have once given a clear light. It's not doing so anymore. It's completely useless. Wicks are plentiful and cheap. Easiest just to throw it away and replace it with another.

And that is exactly what the servant will not do with his people. He's come for people who are bruised. People who have done things to themselves and to others or have had things done to them or just by the accumulation of sin and sorrow, people who seem spiritually useless and couldn't imagine God ever making any good use of them.

It's exactly these people who the servant serves and saves. And a bruise is like a slow bleed, invisible to others, very tender, re-bruises very easily.

He will not break the bruised reed. He comes beside us with his own strength and goodness and slowly and carefully and patiently braces and fortifies and reinforces until that reed can play a new tune or can write a new chapter.

[17:40] And some of you probably feel as though you're a smoldering wick. You've burned brightly in the past, but now you just feel burned out. You feel you're no longer useful to God and you're sputtering and moaning away.

He does not quench. He will not extinguish. He will not puff out the smoldering wick. But he gently pours in the oil of his Holy Spirit.

He fans into flame patiently and over period, fans our faith into flame so that we begin to shine like stars in a dark place. There's a wonderful essay written some 400 years ago by Richard Sibbes on this.

And he says that spiritual bruising is essential. Because bruising means that Christ is at work in us. Because the Holy Spirit has to level the ground in our hearts.

He has to move us from self-reliance to relying on Jesus Christ. And it's a very difficult thing to do. In the practical details of our life, how hard it is to move from relying on myself to rely on Jesus Christ.

[18:46] And for every single one of us, there is at least one area in our lives where Jesus Christ right today is teaching us how to rely on him. And every spiritual bruise and every time the wind comes through and threatens the flame, it's an opportunity for the tenderness and compassion of Jesus Christ.

The only trouble is so often we try and manage on our own. Jesus, I got this. I'm still very much in control. I'll fix this. Then come to you for help. It doesn't work.

When we don't go to Christ and when we try and deal with these things by ourselves, we miss his mercy. We always make it worse. Because he was the one who was ultimately bruised for our sins. It's fantastic. I mean, the Christian life is not God saying, get your act together. It's not saying, live up to this great standard. Jump through these hoops. It's very good for our pride.

The weakest faith, the tiniest faith is very precious to this Jesus. You feel your faith is small and your repentance is pathetic and your grace is feeble.

[19 : 56] This is exactly where this servant is working. We never get to the place of being autonomous from Jesus because he is restoring us to relationship with him.

Even the smallest wisp of faith, he fans into flame. And even though everything I do and everything you do is a mixture of grace and sin, the strength is his, the grace is his, the faithfulness is his.

The bruised reed, he will not break. The smoldering wick, he will not quench. And if you are tempted to despair of your very salvation, you feel your strength is so poor and your hope and your weak and that is the place where Christ is at work.

Let him work. Let him work. It is in the midst of sin. It's in the midst of struggle that Christ upholds us, strengthens us, fans into flame. We're always wrestling with mixed motives and mixed affections.

Christ doesn't love us any less or refuse to work with us until we get it right. But he knows how easily we fool ourselves into thinking that he's got no real use for us and he'd rather just, you know, break us in half or snuff us out and move on.

[21 : 14] He will never break a bruised reed. This is how the servant works. I heard an interview this week with a woman who survived the mass shooting last year in Las Vegas where 58 people were gunned down.

She feels very lucky. And she's committed herself to 58 acts of random kindness in memory of the people who died. It's just lovely. But then she said the reason for it is she said, I want to pay it forward.

The idea being I've been lucky. I need to pay it forward. Now, don't get me wrong. Random acts of kindness are a very good thing. We Christians ought to be experts in this department. But it'll never bring justice to victory.

It's an economic view of the world and it has a dark side to it because if you don't pay it forward, something bad will happen to you. It's the cruelty of karma.

But God says this. He says, behold my servant. He will not break a bruised reed. He will not quench a smoldering wick.

[22 : 19] He will bring justice to victory. And in his name, the Gentiles will hope. Amen.