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The Gospel According to Matthew

The Kindness of the King

December 16, 2018

Sermon Text: Matthew 12:15-21

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 53

In contrast to the wicked, burdensome, distortion of God's Law that the Pharisees' religion oppressed people with, Matthew shows us the kindness of Christ. Jesus has, you recall, just healed a man's withered hand on the Sabbath and in doing so exposed the Pharisees for the wolves that they were. They gnashed their teeth and set off to conspire how to destroy Him. And now Matthew writes:

Mat 12:15-21 Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all (16) and ordered them not to make him

known.

(17) This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: (18) "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.

(19) He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; (20) a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; (21) and in his name the Gentiles will hope."

And we also saw last time that Matthew is quoting Isaiah 42 which is a prophecy of the Messiah.

Our task then is to try to understand what Isaiah meant –

- He will proclaim justice to the Gentiles
- He will not quarrel or cry aloud, voice not heard in the streets

- A bruised reed he will not break
- A smoldering wick he will not quench
- In his name the Gentiles will hope

The New Testament of course is written in a kind of continuum with the Old Testament, bringing to light things that the Old contained but in a much more hidden manner. “The New is in the Old contained, and the Old is in the New explained” as it is said. So, to begin, let’s read these verses which Matthew quotes back in the OT –

Isa 42:1-4 Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him;

he will bring forth justice to the nations.

(2) He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street;

(3) a bruised reed he will not break,

and a faintly burning wick he will not quench;

he will faithfully bring forth justice.

(4) He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.

The Jewish leaders had hardened their hearts against Jesus and the gospel of His kingdom. Jesus, aware of that fact, “withdrew from there.”

It would seem that He at least in greater measure now, focused His preaching and healing on the Gentiles. His “proclaiming justice to the Gentiles” (or as Isaiah puts it, “he will bring forth justice to the nations”), must have been His preaching of the gospel of His kingdom to them and, as He had done earlier with the Jews, effected healing miracles to show them the power and reality of His kingdom.

Jesus’ method was always (and remains so today) to reveal Himself and His Word only to those who received Him. He did not just march through the streets of all the cities loudly announcing Himself and His kingdom. Christ’s kingdom is hidden to those who will not have Him. That is why he told the people he healed to “tell no one.”

You notice that Jesus did not jump right into a loud, heated debate with the Pharisees. He confronted them, and He will confront them again, but He does not *try to convince them*. He will reason with them in the very next section, but still in a way that shows the wickedness of their hard-hearted, willful unbelief.

And so it was and is. All through Christ's earthly ministry and also subsequently in the entire history of the church even into our own day, the same principle stands. The Lord does not reveal Himself to people who have tasted of His goodness, seen the power of His kingdom, and yet refuse to turn from their sin to faith in Him. *And so we are to follow the same pattern today.*

Consider these examples:

Mar 1:42-45 And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. (43) And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, (44) and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them." (45) But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.

Mar 5:40-43 And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. (41) Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." (42) And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was

twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. (43) And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Mat 13:14-17 Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: ""You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive." (15) For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.' (16) But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. (17) For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

Now, it is important for us to pause at this point and think this through very carefully. This should be extremely encouraging to all of us. And I think it is a very good corrective to keep us from getting sidetracked as we do the Lord's work.

Do you realize that it is not your job to argue and debate over and over again with people who have no desire to hear of Christ? People who have heard and

hate the gospel? Yes, the Lord sent Isaiah to preach to the Jews –

Isa 6:8-11 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me." (9) And he said, "Go, and say to this people: "'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'" (10) Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." (11) Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste,

But you can see that Isaiah's preaching ministry was one of judgment to a people under judgment, people who had heard and heard and heard but who refused the kindness of the Lord. Isaiah's preaching actually effected further judgment of blindness and deafness to the Lord.

There are people, in other words – many of them – who we need to withdraw from and stop wasting our time on them. Like those Pharisees. I have found this to be confirmed in the ministry we have of exposing wolves in the church. I do not waste my time trying to convince pastors or other

professing Christians who do not want to hear about evil in the church. I move on and I teach and write to those who you could say, "follow" us. They want to hear. Many of them are downcast. It is these that I focus upon.

How much time do many Christians waste in trying to "convert" relatives who have already trampled on Christ's blood? Rather, we need to be watching for the fields that are ripe for harvest, for people who ask us to give an account of the hope in us. I do not enter into long, drawn out arguments with people when I detect (and it doesn't take long) that they simply want to argue and oppose Christ's truth? And you do not need to do that either.

Jesus did not do this. He did not shout in the streets. He did not get into fiery, loud arguments with fools. He announced His truth and then gave more of it to those who had ears to hear. But he withdrew from the fools like the Pharisees.

A Bruised Reed and a Smoldering Wick

Now look at this statement again:

(20) a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory;

At the same time as the Messiah withdraws from the likes of the Pharisees, He will not withdraw Himself and His Word from anyone who has even the smallest genuine desire to hear Him. Listen to William Hendriksen on this:

“The real significance of the bruised reed which he will not break and of the smoldering wick which he will not quench is therefore that he will treat with profound and genuine sympathy, with tender concern, whatever is near to exhaustion. He will impart strength to the weak, to all who while pining away ask him for help. He will heal the sick, seek and save tax-collectors and sinners, comfort mourners, cheer the fearful, reassure doubters, feed the famished, and grant pardon to those who repent of their sins. HE is the true Immanuel.”

Let’s pause here and think very, very carefully and thankfully about this.

We are Reformed Christians. We confess the theology of the Reformation. We are Calvinists. And as a result we know that the sinner, like all of us when we were born into this world, is dead in sin. Not sick in sin. Dead in sin. When it comes to hearing God’s Word and exercising real repentance and faith in Christ, he has no more ability than a corpse. He

cannot believe. He cannot see and understand. The Lord must give the sinner faith, he must regenerate our heart, give us eyes to see and ears to hear.

But, the sinner, dead in his sin, CAN do something. He can see Christ heal the sick and raise the dead and create eyes in people blind from birth. He can see the empty tomb. He can know and in fact does know, that there is a God who is his Creator and to whom all men owe acknowledgment and thanksgiving. And *like a blind man or a leper, the sinner can answer Jesus’ question, “Do you want to be made well?”* Think of it. The Pharisees gave the answer, “NO! We do not want to be made well.”

To such people, Christ gives no eyes, no ears, no light for their darkness. In fact, He withdraws from them and their dark blindness increases.

To repeat – *we often waste time and energy, and even find ourselves working against the Lord, by trying to “heal” people who do not want to be made well.*

The Unpardonable Sin

Closely related to all of this, the next section in Matthew 12 deals with a subject that people often ask questions about – *the unpardonable sin.* Let’s

just take the closing time today to read this account of still another example of people who saw and heard, clear and plain evidence that Jesus is the Messiah, and yet rejected Him:

Mat 12:22-32 Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. (23) And all the people were amazed, and said, "Can this be the Son of David?" (24) But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons." (25) Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. (26) And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? (27) And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. (28) But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. (29) Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. (30) Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. (31) Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy

against the Spirit will not be forgiven. (32) And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

As we will see in two weeks when we consider this section, there is huge encouragement and sober warning here for people who profess to be Christians. Encouragement if you are already saved, or even if you are just one of those bruised reeds or smoldering wicks with barely a spark of interest in knowing Christ. And sobering warning if you are a Pharisee or a person who is just playing games with the Lord.