

Matthew 12:15-21

I. Verses 15-16 – Jesus, aware of this, *withdrew* from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all and ordered them *not* to make him known.

Jesus was aware of the fact that the Pharisees were conspiring against Him and seeking to destroy Him (12:14). And so in the face of this threat, Jesus withdrew. Now if you were an enemy of Jesus and wanted to spin this to your own advantage, you might say that Jesus fled – that He ran away. Was Jesus afraid of the Pharisees? Why not continue to challenge and humiliate the Pharisees in public debate? Where is the bravery and confidence that you would expect in a leader – much less the Messiah Himself? What does it mean when *Jesus* withdraws? How do you explain this? But there is more.

Many people with various sicknesses followed Jesus, and he healed them all, and ordered them not to make Him known. Once again, if you were an enemy of Jesus and wanted to spin this to your own advantage, you might say that Jesus was trying to hide something. Why else would he be trying to keep people quiet and stay under the radar? Is Jesus still “afraid” of confrontation with the Pharisees? To many people, this would not be a very *impressive* picture of Jesus. Is Jesus really someone worth following when He withdraws in the face of hostility and then tells people to keep quiet about what He is doing?

So what does it *mean* when Jesus withdraws? What does it *mean* when Jesus orders people not to make Him known? Well, Matthew didn’t find these things in the least bit awkward or embarrassing. In every single thing that Jesus did, Matthew only saw *more proof* that Jesus was the promised Savior. For many years before Jesus came, God had been showing the prophets exactly what Jesus would be like and the kinds of things He would do. So even when Jesus *withdraws*, and tells people not to make Him known, Matthew says that we should have known! This is just the kind of thing we should have been *expecting* all along.

II. Verses 17-18a – 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.”

“Behold”

Look! See! Gaze upon! This is God’s will for us – that we behold and gaze upon His servant. My desire for us in this study is that we would obey His command and find that it not only satisfies us completely, but that it *changes* us as well.

“Behold, my servant”

It’s interesting that when God Himself echoes His own words from Isaiah, He refers to His *Son*.

✓ Matthew 3:16-17 – And 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.***”

- ✓ Matthew 17:1-2, 5 – And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light... He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “***This is my beloved SON, with whom I am well pleased***; listen to him.”

And now Matthew also quotes these words from Isaiah, and once again Jesus is God’s *servant*: “Behold, my *servant* whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased.” The word that Matthew uses for “servant” can also be translated “son”, and so I think he means for us to feel the tension. A son is not the same thing as a servant. My sons are not my servants! A servant does not have any of the rights of a son. A servant does not have the same honor as a son. A servant is a subordinate whose main job is to take orders and obey His master. And yet Jesus is *both* – Son and servant. As perfect God, He is the one and only Son of the Father. As true man, He is God’s servant.

Philippians 2:6-7 – “Though he was in the form of God, [he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

This is humility beyond what we can ever begin to understand. And yet it is *this* example of humility which is to be the model after which we pattern our own lives (“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus”; Phil. 2:5). *Behold, my servant*. And as you behold Him, be instructed and changed.

“Behold, my servant whom I uphold, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased.”

God Himself finds infinite delight in His servant. Can you imagine how beautiful, and wondrous, and precious this servant must be for God to say such things about Him? There is only one servant whom the Father has chosen. There is only one beloved in whom the Father’s soul is well pleased. And that one is Jesus. In the whole Bible, God never speaks these words of anyone else. Don’t you think, then, that we ought to be giving Jesus our deepest and most undivided attention? In Matthew 17, the voice from heaven said: “*Listen* to him.” Here we are told to *behold* him. If God Himself is infinitely satisfied in His servant, doesn’t it seem ludicrous that we should spend our days looking for happiness anywhere else? Jesus is God’s beloved, in whom His soul delights. May our souls also delight in Jesus, instead of looking to the vain and empty things of this world.

III. Verse 18b – I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the [nations; NIV].

I will put my Spirit upon my Servant. I will *empower* Him, and *enable* Him, and *equip* Him... *in order that* He might proclaim justice to the nations.

Just as a side note: If Jesus needed the anointing and empowering of the Spirit in order to fulfill His life's calling, *how much more* should we be crying out to God for the anointing of His Spirit that we might daily walk worthy of our calling? Jesus said: "Ask and you will receive" (Jn. 16:24). James said: "You have not because you ask not" (James 4:2).

But in any case, do we really want to hear about *justice*? Isn't it love, and compassion, and mercy that we want?

- ✓ Isaiah 51:4-5 – Give attention to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation; for a *law* will go out from me, and I will set my *justice* for a light to the peoples. My *righteousness* draws near, my *salvation* has gone out, and my arms will *judge* the peoples; the coastlands hope for me, and for my arm they wait.

When Jesus proclaims justice to the nations, He is proclaiming the good news of a salvation that is *righteous* and according to God's *holy law*. He is showing us *the way* to be truly and really *right* with God. This is the justice that God will empower His servant to proclaim. What could guilty sinners like us possibly need to hear more than this?!? And so this is what God says to us: *Behold, my servant... listen* to Him. So what will we see? What will we hear?

IV. Verse 19 – He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.

God's servant will not be loud and arrogant. Jesus was not the kind who just wanted to win the argument, prove the point, and put those who are wrong in their place. But unfortunately, this is a perfect description of far too many Christians. It would be bad enough if it was a slightly accurate description. Especially when we're right (or *think* we're right), we can become quarrelsome, arrogant, intent only on winning the argument and proving our point. And in so doing, we can only find ourselves strangers to Jesus. Jesus was definitely not afraid to stand for the things that were right and true, and at times He had some pretty harsh words for the Pharisees. But as we have seen, there were also times when He would *withdraw* and *lay low* in order to avoid a fight. Because even though Jesus was *always* right, He really wasn't interested in the mere winning of arguments or proving of points. No. Jesus came to proclaim God's righteous salvation. He came to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). Therefore, He is meek, and quiet, and gentle – *just like* Isaiah said He would be. And so once again, God says to us: "*Behold, my servant.*" And as we obediently behold Him, may we truly *learn* from what we *see*. May we be humble and gentle like Him.

V. Verse 20a – A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench.

In Bible times, a reed was used for things such as measuring sticks, pens, and supports of various kinds. The value of a reed was that it was stiff and straight. But if a reed was bent or cracked, it was useless for anything. Since reeds were so common and so cheap, a bruised reed would very naturally be broken and thrown away and replaced with a new one. In the same way, a defective candle flickers and gives off a lot of smoke. And once again, a new wick was common and cheap. So a flickering and smoking candle would very naturally be blown out and the useless wick replaced with a new one. Which one of us would do any different? And yet this is what God says about His servant, Jesus: "A bruised reed *he will not* break, and a smoldering wick *he*

will not quench.” Instead, He will make the bruised reed whole again. He will make the smoking wick to burn bright and clean. What a vivid and beautiful picture of the tenderness and the gentleness of Jesus. Because of our sin and guilt, we were broken and useless, and worthy to be discarded – just like those bruised reeds and smoking wicks. But instead of casting us aside, Jesus came *to us*, and He proclaims *to us* the good news of how we can be made whole.

VI. Verse 20b – “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, *until he brings justice to victory.*”

There’s that word “justice” again. But now instead of justice being *proclaimed*, we see justice *triumphing victorious*. God’s servant will proclaim justice to the nations *until* the day when that justice is victorious in all the earth (One day, God will create new heavens and a new earth in which *only righteousness* dwells – 2 Pet. 3:13). So even today Jesus is tenderly, and gently, and patiently proclaiming through His Church the good news of God’s righteous salvation. And Jesus will continue to do this “*until*” the day when God’s righteous salvation is triumphant and victorious in all the world. We are still in the “*until*”. Therefore, we must still be about the Savior’s work of tenderly and gently seeking out the bruised reeds and smoldering wicks that are all around us, everywhere we go. We can’t forget If we are truly *beholding* God’s servant as He is presented to us in *these verses*, we *must* become *like Him*. As the Apostle John writes: “We know that when he appears we shall be *like him*, **because** we shall *see him* as he is” (1 Jn. 3:2).

Though in one sense we have *already* been made whole, in another sense we have *not yet* been made whole. Because of our sin, we are still like those bruised reeds and smoldering wicks. But one day God’s servant will bring justice to victory, and then these bruised reeds will be made perfectly and everlastingly whole – then these smoldering wicks will burn pure and bright for the glory of our Creator.

✓ Revelation 7:9-10; 21:4-5 – I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” ... God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. And he who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’”

And who is it that will bring justice to victory? It is Jesus, God’s servant. *Behold*, my servant... *listen* to Him.

Of course, when God’s salvation finally triumphs, it will not be good news for everyone. God’s salvation is righteous and just. When it triumphs, all of the sinful and the unrighteous will be finally judged and cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 21:8; 22:14-15; 2 Thess. 1:5-9). So as those who are sinful and unrighteous, we desperately need to know: What *is* the good news of God’s righteous salvation? What *is* the way for guilty sinners to be right with God? How can *we* who are like those bruised reeds and smoking wicks be restored and made whole again? Listen now to the very last line of Matthew’s quotation from Isaiah:

VII. Verse 21 – And *in his name* the nations will hope.

In *whose* name? In the *servant's* name! God's servant, Jesus, is not just the messenger who proclaims God's righteous salvation – *He is* God's righteous salvation. It's as though He would come to us and say: "Let me tell you about God's righteous salvation... here I am." Jesus didn't just take the form of a servant by being made in the likeness of men. A true servant is obedient to His master. And what did God send His servant to do? He sent Him to the cross to die in our place.

- ✓ Philippians 2:8 – Being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming *obedient* to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Who was it who hung there on the cross? It was God's servant, His *beloved*, in whom His soul was well-pleased. *This is the one* on whom God poured out His wrath, so that *in Him*, guilty sinners like us could be *righteously* saved.

- ✓ Philippians 2:9 – *Therefore* God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.
- ✓ Acts 4:12 – There is *salvation* in no one else, for there is *no other name* under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

"*In his name*", God says, "the nations will hope." This is God's will for His servant – that He would be glorified in us as we hope in His name (2 Thess. 1:10). And, of course, this tells you what God's will is for us – that we should glorify His servant by always hoping in His name!

"*Behold, my servant.*" This is the will of God for us. This is what I want to be doing for the rest of my life. And as we do this, may we learn to be just as tender, and gentle, and compassionate, and patient with others as our Savior has been with us.

Teaching our Children

Q. Who is God's servant?

A. God's servant is Jesus.

Q. Fill in the blank: God calls us to _____ His servant. Or: "_____, my servant..."

A. Behold! Look! Gaze upon! (Reflect upon what this means)

Q. As we behold Jesus, what should happen?

A. We should become more and more *like* Him (1 John 3:2).

Q. If Jesus is God (He is the *Son* of the Father), how can he also be God's *servant*?

A. The Son of God became a *man*! As a true *man*, Jesus is God's servant (See Scripture on the top of page 2).

- ✓ Talk with your children about this amazing *example* of humility and what it means for us (cf. Philippians 2:5).

Q. How does God "feel" about His servant?

A. God calls His servant His beloved with whom His soul is well-pleased (in whom His soul delights).

- ✓ If God finds so much delight in His servant, how much more should we find our true delight in Him, and not in the vain and empty things of this world? (Discuss)
- Q. What will the servant proclaim to the nations?
- A. *Justice* (God's righteous salvation. The good news of how we can be *right* with God.)
See Scripture on top of page 3
- Q. How will the servant proclaim God's righteous salvation? Will He shout and argue?
- A. No! Even though He is always right, His goal will not be to win arguments and *force* people to see that He is right, but to humbly and *gently* save souls.
- ✓ What a beautiful Savior! Our goal should be to love others and seek their salvation – not to win arguments. We must learn to be just as gentle and tender with others as He has been with us (reflect on the picture of the bruised reed and the smoldering wick – talk about how *we* are the bruised reeds and the smoldering wicks).
- Q. Where should we look for the salvation that God's servant proclaims?
- A. We can only find this salvation *in the servant!* ("In his name the nations will hope")
- Q. Are you glorifying God's servant, Jesus, by putting your hope in His name?