

The Gentle Messiah

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[0 : 00] A week ago, Neil, when he was preaching when I was away, preached as we were going through Matthew, for those of you who are visiting, we have been going through Matthew's Gospel, a chapter at a time in our Sunday morning services, I've taken a break for it over the festive period, but a number of weeks ago, Neil was preaching from Matthew chapter 12, and in that chapter, there is a prophecy fulfilled about Jesus, and in describing Jesus when he is opposed by the Pharisees and those that don't want to have him as their Lord, we have the quote from Isaiah chapter 42, the chapter that we read together, and from the beginning to verse 4.

I'd like to read that again because it's applied very directly to Jesus, and I want us to spend a little time this morning, it's one of my favourite passages, and one that I've preached from before here, reminding ourselves of the nature of Jesus, and that this is the Christ that we are actually to imitate also, in as much as we are to be Christ-like, in many ways in which we can't imitate Jesus because of his perfection and because of his glory, because he's God, but there is, in his humanity, ways that we can seek to imitate him and be like him, Christ-like people, and this is one of the ways in which we can.

So this passage is applied to Jesus in Matthew 12. Here is my servant, Isaiah 42, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight. I will put my spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the street. A bruised reed, he will not break a smoldering wick, he will not snuff out.

In faithfulness, he will bring justice. He will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law, the islands will put their hope.

[2 : 04] Now I want us to just focus on Jesus and the person of Jesus for a few moments this morning, and be encouraged, and I hope, if not physically, warmed, then spiritually, and informed by the insight into his character that we are given here from Scripture.

The other night we spoke about God being a rock, and one of the things about rock that we noticed was that it can be for us full of surprises.

The deeper we dig, the deeper even we dig, then often we will find the treasures and the precious metals, or the precious stones, that we find in rock.

And so as we dig a little bit deeper into the character of Jesus, then hopefully we find something that it refreshes us and encourages us today.

And there are a number of characteristics, at least three characteristics about Jesus that I want to focus on this morning, and maybe ones that we don't focus on that much as we look at it from this particular passage.

[3 : 20] And the first is that this Christ who comes is humble. The Christ who comes is humble. Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight.

I will put my spirit on him. Here is Jesus Christ, and we see great humility in the character and person of the Son of God, who is the King of Kings, who sustains and who holds the universe in his hands, and yet becomes dependent as a newborn child and as a child that grows up in dependence on his parents, and also, in this case, dependent on the Holy Spirit.

This God, God the Son, who by nature requires nobody else, requires nobody to sustain him, nobody to hold him, nobody to nurture him, nobody to teach him, nobody to direct him and guide him and lead him, finds himself humbled to depend on human beings.

He learned over the course of his years up to public ministry and beyond. He learned to be the perfect human being.

He learned obedience to his parents. He learned his own calling as God's Son. He learned about who he was as he developed knowledge and insight and understanding.

[5 : 08] He didn't have the fullness of knowledge from the womb onwards. That was something that he depended on God the Father and God the Holy Spirit to teach him in his humanity.

Through his conception and his childhood and his baptism and his ministry, right through to his death and resurrection, he is the servant of God.

You know, a servant by nature, if he's any kind of servant, if he's any kind of servant at all, will be humble. And here we find that characteristic that God the Son becomes a servant and that in itself speaks of great humility.

No questions, no quarrels, no rebellion, no struggle, sinful struggle against that. He takes that on board in order to redeem us, in order to be our Saviour.

He humbles himself, pours himself out into this work. That's really what the Philippians 2 passage speaks about when it speaks about emptying himself, pouring himself out into this task of being your Saviour and being mine.

[6 : 26] Taking on board is great humility in his incarnation. It's an amazing characteristic when someone who is great is able to lay aside that greatness in order to serve.

We see it sometimes at human levels in ways that are inspiring and encouraging for us. And yet here we have the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords doing it perfectly in order to be our Saviour. What I'd like to say by way of ongoing application as we go through this is that we are to imitate Christ in that quality and characteristic as Christians every day.

And I hope that you find it relentlessly practical that every day we are asked as believers to imitate Christ in this way, that we are humble people. It's a precious and it's a rare virtue that this world does much better with when people show humility.

It stands face to face against pride and against self-righteousness and against self-domination where we must get what we want in our way and we proudly stand in our own strength.

[8 : 00] It's a great place to be humble because we are admitting and we continue to admit our need of the Living God. People don't become Christians because they'll not admit their need of a Saviour.

And there might not be an expressive pride in that. People might not be proud and arrogant people, but there's a spiritual pride there. If we stay away from Jesus Christ and His claims and His love and His grace, we are saying we don't really need Him. I'm not going to be a servant and our struggles can often be when we are unwilling to take on board this characteristic of Jesus, of servanthood that is upheld by God.

But we are asked to be a servant. We are asked to be submissive. And for all of us, that's a great task.

It's a great task to say, you will not mine. You know you are right. You are a loving and good and perfect God.

I don't understand that sometimes, but I am servile to that. Or a servant to that. Servile in the best sense of that word of course, where we therein find our freedom and our life.

[9 : 32] But when we're humble, not only before God but with one another, it makes a great difference, doesn't it? It stops quarrels, fights, party spirit, self-interest, bitterness.

A lot of these things are dealt with when we are able to practically be humble. Now that shows itself, it will show itself at the breakfast table. It will show itself how you deal with your family at home, how you respond to everyday things, how you deal at work.

When you humbly come under Christ and respond as a humble Christ-like believer in the way that he himself was willing to be a servant, are we willing to be servants to Christ and to one another?

And put our own interests second to the interests of others, to consider others better than ourselves. It's one of the great New Testament characteristics of the believer. And that can be in the school playground, it can be in the university lecture hall, it can be in our jobs, in our homes, it can be in every word that we are, whoever we are, wherever we are, we reflect his humility.

So he's humble, but he's also quiet. Verse 2 says, he will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets.

[10 : 59] Now that's not to say, it's not giving us an absolute picture here of Jesus that he was always quiet, that he never shouted, we know from Scripture, from the Gospels that he did.

He raged with an absolute justice against the abuses in the temple and the money changers in the temple. And we know that he cried with a loud voice on the cross, it is finished.

But as a reflection of his character generally, we find a quietness and a calm dignity is being spoken of here.

He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets. There's a deep seated kind of assurance about Jesus Christ as he goes about his work, as he learns of his task, as he fulfills his role as the redeemer. He has come to serve and he's come to do the Father's business.

Even as a child he had understood enough to know that. And he knew exactly what was required of him and his work as a saviour.

[12:09] So he didn't really engage in a marketing or a publicity campaign about what he'd come to do. He didn't harangue people and shout at people and demand of them to respond to him and believe in him.

He didn't threaten people to become Christians. We're often like that, but he didn't do that. He was silent, as Scripture tells us before, as accusers, not because he was guilty, far from it, but because he knew this was the task, this was the way that he had to go.

The one who knew the unqualified attention of the angels throughout eternity was the one who was willing to be ignored. Jesus Christ was willing to be passed by on the street, be unnoticed in his birth.

He wasn't recognised for who he was. And he never harassed people and harangued them into his kingdom and into faith in him.

So often there's a complexity about the interaction between Jesus and people, not just in the Gospels but in our own lives, that remind us that he doesn't often come and doesn't, by nature, come shouting or crying out or raising his voice in the streets.

[13:37] How often have you said, I wish Jesus would just show himself then everyone would believe. I wish he would do something dramatic and then people would believe, but there's a complexity in the relationship between humanity and Jesus because he knows that that doesn't convince us. Miracles don't necessarily convince us.

It didn't convince people in Jesus' day and it wouldn't convince us now. If Jesus walked into the room today, not in his second coming but just as a person, it wouldn't necessarily make any difference to us.

Those who have faith would believe and those who don't would not. And the question is one in our hearts so often and in our conscience and he appeals to us through the quiet voice of Scripture and through his own calm, dignified and clear demeanour.

That's the kind of saviour he is. We need to remember that and recognise that we so often are looking for great miracles and great evidences. I'll believe if, I'll believe if that happens, if the next thing, if I get this, if I get that.

And yet we're asked to see him and recognise him and believe him simply for who he is in his calm, quiet dignity. He's not going to shout louder and therefore will believe more. The evidence is there.

[14:56] The truth is there, the Scripture is there. The person is there, the work is there. He's done his work. He's silent before his accusers. He's gone to the cross. He's raised from the dead. The work is there.

And in his quietness he appeals to us to have greater faith and deeper commitment to him. And that same quietness is a calm dignity that we can share in our lives as we trust and believe in our Father, even against all the odds to use a betting term, that we are able to rely on him, lean on him, believe in him, hold his hand.

That's the quiet dignity of faith that is reflected in the nature and person of Jesus as our perfect example and substitute.

Sometimes people in this life who make the most noise are those who have the least faith and maybe the least to shout about. They're the most insecure, often attention seeking. The more noise they make about others, the more the attention is deflected from themselves.

Condimentary, judgmental, ranting and raving about the state of the world and the nature of how bad everyone else and everything else is.

[16:35] And yet there's often that a lack of the quiet and the gentle getting on with it, faith and trust in the living God. So we see him as quiet, but we also see him in his dealings, in the gospels and particularly in this lovely picture here, as one who is gentle.

A bruised reed he will not break, a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. Brilliant pictures. Pictures that you understand and I understand and pictures that reflect the kind of struggles that we often

have.

A picture of the bruised reed, something just maybe in the desert or beside the water. Thousands upon thousands of these reeds, common and ordinary though they were.

And one of them among many maybe battered and bruised by the wind or the water. You know what it's like, kind of bent over and ripped away bit in the middle.

And you wouldn't really notice it. And we're told here that Jesus, the bruised reed, he will not break. He stoops down to care and protect and look after to heal his bruised reed.

[17 : 55] You're unnoticed by everyone. Not worth protecting. Not worth avoiding. Not worth just not standing on.

That's a bruised reed. What's a reed? Your common is dirt. It's not of any intrinsic value. It's nothing there. It's just a reed.

Doesn't produce fruit. Doesn't produce food. Doesn't look particularly great. It's just there. It's one of these things in creation that's just there. We don't really know necessarily what for.

A bruised reed. He doesn't break. And it's a reminder to us of our lives and our situations.

That so often that we are like that. We are bruised. And we will be bruised. He's not saying that there will not be bruising in our lives, but we will be bruised.

[18 : 56] We know that. And he understands that. He takes that. He sees the bruising and brokenness and rejection and disappointment himself in his life.

Isaiah speaks about him being bruised and battered. And more so we know and understand in the cross. But he does know and understand the ill winds that blow.

And he sees and understands and knows when we cry over our own needs and our own brokenness and bruising and sin and guilt. He's not unaware of that. It's not that he doesn't notice. But he doesn't break us. He doesn't ignore us. He loves us intensely. He's just stooping by the individual in this world of millions of people.

And we look around and pray about some of the problems and difficulties. I just feel this time it was very easy to just become so self-absorbed and happy with our presence and family and things are great.

[20 : 06] We don't really want to hear any bad news or anything that's difficult. We think it's too much to deal with. So we just sometimes ignore it altogether. I don't want to hear about that. I just want to have good times myself.

And yet we recognise that this is the God who could have chosen to do the same thing. He could have chosen just to stay in heaven with the Fatherhood and the Spirit. You know the needs of the people are so great but the fellowship we are so incredible.

Absolutely perfect and wonderful and glorious. Do I really want to go down to that place where I'm going to be rejected and ignored and those that I've created are going to spit in my face and they're going to crucify.

Do I want that? Do I want a face sitting in all its power in this glory? Do I want to do that? Yet we find that he stoopes down and he binds and he heals our brokenness.

We know and sometimes feel very delicate and tender and fragile in a hostile environment. And yet he's the one who can heal and sustain and support us in ways that no one else can.

[21 : 17] The bruised reed, the kind of, I think the brokenness of experiencing of life is pictured there. But then he speaks about the smothering wick. He will not snuff out.

Smothering flax, the wick that went into the candle or the oil lamp which sometimes almost was snuffed out.

And when it was almost snuffed out it needed oil gently to put in, fed into the oil again so that it could once again ignite or with the same with a candle, you see the candle almost out.

And you need to deal with it very gently in order for it not to be snuffed out. Or the fire. Setting the fires easy and it usually works well.

Yesterday for some reason the fire and the man's just, we didn't light. And it was so annoying. So you have to deal with it very gently.

[22 : 26] Pull out bits of paper, put in another bits of paper, a couple of sticks, the odd bit of coal strategically placed so that the whole thing wouldn't just go out.

And the bottom of it opened out and then the Scotsman paper put in the front so that the draft goes up and the air gets in and the fire lights.

And you know you need all these things together, the air and the fire and the material to make the fire burn. And the smoldering flak he will not snuff out.

Not worthless, not hopeless, useless fire, useless lamp, useless candle. As many times we feel that our spiritual light is almost out. Extinguished, we feel cold and weak spiritually.

And almost without faith, there's nothing much burning spiritually. There's not much light and there's not much heat and there's not much spiritual energy there.

[23 : 35] And we're embarrassed to go to God and we're embarrassed with our faith and our lack of faith and we think that he's going to judge us or condemn us or say we're hopeless believers.

But he is the one who takes us when our faith is almost out and he breathes life into us when we come to him. And he encourages us and he fans into flame the little that's there.

And he gives us the potential to see who Jesus is again. He's the one who himself will not falter or be discouraged. We can trust in him but even though we falter and are discouraged, he's faithful and he will not be himself broken and discouraged.

He will not be bruised beyond redemption and his light will not go out. He is the light of the world and he is the protector of the weak and he is our redeemer and our Savior.

I the Lord in verse 6, as they are called you in righteousness, I will take hold of your hand. He's made a promise. He will hold us in our weakness. I've made a covenant and I'll open your eyes and I'll free the captives and I'll release those in prison.

[24 : 55] And we remember that great characteristic of our living God who sustains us and who understands us in our bruising and who is the one who will not extinguish our faith but will keep us going.

And I want us to be the same in our attitude to one another. I want us to care for one another and when we're struggling to support one another and when we're broken to be there for one another and to not just consider our own situation and how good our situation might be and have no time for others in their need but to recognise who we are spiritually and our vulnerabilities and then recognise that same vulnerability that may be in others and be gentle with them and be humble and be quiet in our faith as we trust in the living God.

So our great need today is to seek Jesus Christ out. Seek His company. Seek His character. Seek His healing and His gentleness and His humility and His quietness.

Look for it. It's not just going to come. It will not fall through that roof onto your lap. We need to seek Him out. It's part of our responsibility as believers to do so, to be in His company, to build that relationship, to seek the reality of His life. How much time do we spend in His company?

How much time do we spend seeking Him out, seeking His grace and His favour and His love?

From next week, and I know it's going to be a bit staggered in its beginnings, but I would really like this congregation to do MacChain's Bible reading in a year.

[26 : 53] Obviously, in the same way as Jesus doesn't cajole or force anyone, neither obviously would I. But I'm going to do it, and I hope that others would consider going through MacChain's Bible readings in a year.

That is, he's ordered it in such a way that you can read through the Bible in a year. It means a lot of reading, but you can do a little bit in the morning. You can do a little bit with your sandwich at lunch, and you can do a little bit with the family in the evening, and then on your own at night. And each Sunday we'll do one of the chapters in church.

Because I don't think we're reading as we ought the Bible. We've got lots of time, and lots of time for many other things. Many other things take up our time.

But we often think, well, I don't really have time for the Bible. And the trouble with that is that we're then not digging deep into the rock and finding out new and wondrous things about Jesus Christ.

And I'm going to do that in parallel with the prayer and Ephesians that I spoke about the other Wednesdays, I think it was a Wednesday evening, going to get that. So we can try and pray that every, if you want, pray that every day.

[28 : 08] But I want us to focus on the Bible as the living Word of God in our lives. I think very often our troubles stem from not knowing the character of God and the will and the Word of God.

And we struggle that way then. But the more we soak ourselves in His riches, the more I think we'll learn of His character. And also the more we pray to know His love, its width and breadth and height and depth, and the more we understand that, then He will do for us imaginably more than we can ask and even imagine.

And that's a great prayer to make every day in 2011, if God so allows us to enter into that year. That's power, hedge and prayer.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that we can learn a little bit more about you. The bruised reed, you will not break, and the smoldering wick you will not snuff out. And so often we feel like bruised reeds spiritually and smoldering wicks.

We feel that we're almost extinguished, that our faith is poor, that we've been battered and bruised by circumstances and experiences that seem to be harsh and beyond our own understanding.

[29 : 27] And we question and we wonder why. And in so doing may we take our questions and our fears and our lack of light and our lack of spiritual energy and vision and effectiveness, take it to you.

And may we find your nurture and your nature, your comfort and your confidence and your miraculous intervention in our lives and strength to cope.

And we pray that we would recognise the evil one and the evil one's attempts to draw us from you and often through negative and relentlessly harsh experiences or spiritual feelings.

And we pray against him and pray protection from him. Pray that we would recognise within a battle, we put on the armour of God and that we would remember that the battle has already won and that the fight is temporary and that we have a great hope and a great future.

At the end of this year may we remind ourselves of the swift passage of time and that we're all getting older, some of us older than others. And remind us Lord God, that our time here is short, even at its longest, it's short.

[30 : 48] And that death is no respecter of persons. Remind us of these things, not to be morbid or to be negative but to be realistic and faithful and full of joy and life and love that comes from the living God.

So help us we pray and bless our parting Sam of praise in Jesus' name. Amen.