

“Behold the Father’s Beloved”

Matthew 12:14-21

January 20, 2019

On occasion I have come home at night from a meeting at church to find my family downstairs watching a movie. So I would go down, plop myself down on the recliner and start watching with them but not having a clue as to what was happening. So I ask “what’s going on?” hoping that someone will hit pause and give me a quick summary of the plot thus far.

As we come back to Matthew 12, its like walking into the middle of a movie and someone needs to say, “What’s going on?” It just won’t quite make sense unless someone fills us in on the plot from the first half. So let me take you back to the end of chapter 11 and review where we are so that so we can see the general flow of the text (because everything from the end of chapter 11 through the end of chapter 12 is connected).

In vs. 27 of chapter 11, Jesus made an outstanding claim: *“All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.”*

This puts Jesus in the place of ultimate authority. The Father has put all things in His hands. What’s so beautiful, as we saw last week, is what Jesus does with that authority. With man absolute power corrupts absolutely. But Jesus uses His absolute authority to rest, restore, and heal. His authority is cloaked in compassion, gentleness, and humility. [Vs. 28-30]

Let me pause here to suggest some additional application. Compassion is one side of Jesus authority. There is another side in which He will one day rule with a rod of iron to bring the whole earth under His rule. To His enemies He is a warrior, but to followers He is a Shepherd of the most gentle kind. Here’s what I want us to see. If Jesus uses His authority with gentleness and humility in such a way that we can find ultimate rest under its shade, then whatever authority we have been given as under-shepherds in the home and church should have the same effect.

The authority that God grants a husband and father in the home, should not cause his wife and children to be wearied, fearful, exhausted, or broken hearted. Nor should the authority that God grants leaders in the church cause people to be crippled with burdens and heavy hearts. Our leadership should result in rest, refuge and restoration, as we imitate the gentleness and humility of Jesus and as we lead those who follow back to the hope that God is sovereign and his grace restores.

Last week we saw the contrast between the rest-giving leadership of Jesus in chapter 11 with the leadership of the Pharisees in chapter 12. The Pharisees took the Sabbath, which was meant for rest, and saddled it with endless burdens of legalism that exasperated God’s people.

The drama of chapter 12 involved a verbal sparring match between Jesus and the Pharisees over the Sabbath. While the Pharisees questioned if it was “lawful” (according to their traditions) to heal on the Sabbath, Jesus demonstrated by Scriptural precedent that “it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” (12) and proceeded to do good by healing a man with a withered arm.

This brings us to the irony of vs. 14 that while Jesus was doing good on the Sabbath (healing, restoring), the Pharisees were conspiring evil in their hearts.

Rather than seeing God’s affirmation of Jesus’ ministry in this healing miracle, vs. 14 says, *“the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.” “But Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. Many followed Him, and He healed them all, and warned them not to tell who He was. This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet...”*

As we come to this portion of the passage which we will be focusing on this week, many of us would be tempted to just read over vs. 14-15 as though they are secondary in significance. But for the Jews these events would have been puzzling.

Remember, the purpose for which Matthew is writing this gospel: **to show convincing proof that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, Israel's long-awaited King to sit on David's throne and fulfill the promise of an everlasting kingdom that will be a blessing to all the nations of the earth, including the Gentiles (cf. Gen 12).**

Jesus does two puzzling things here that don't seem to fit the profile of a Messiah. First, He withdraws avoiding further conflict with His opponents, the Pharisees. He doesn't seem interested in being in a place of self-defense. The second unusual thing that Jesus does, is that He warns people not to tell who He is, as if to dampen His growing popularity.

Now just imagine for a moment that you are a Jew, trying to discern whether or not Jesus might be the Messiah. What kind of deliverer backs down from His opponents? And why would He not want to gain as much support and popularity as possible among people?

Would Israel's Messiah clash with the religious establishment and be violently opposed by them and rejected by the most prominent religious leaders?

Furthermore, Jesus is characterized by compassion. He seems to be more of a healer than a warrior. How will He overthrow the Romans? He takes a stand for truth but then withdraws from His opponents.

What Matthew wants us to see is that while ***Jesus does not fulfill the messianic role according to man's expectations, He does fulfill the role according to the Father's pleasure.*** Matthew wants us to see that what is unexpected from a human perspective actually fits God's design for His chosen Servant.

He does this by quoting Isaiah 42 to affirm that the character qualities we see in Jesus are precisely what God has ordained for His chosen Servant.
[Vs. 18-21]

Let me point out several aspects of Jesus ministry in fulfillment of Isaiah 42:

1. *Under the Spirit's anointing the scope of Messiah's reign would exceed the Jews to encompass the whole earth, including the gentiles.*

Verse 18 ends by saying, "I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He shall proclaim justice to the gentiles." Vs. 21: "And in His name the Gentiles will hope."

While it may be premature to see this world-wide fulfillment in chapter 12, this is where the Gospel of Matthew will climax in chapter 28 when Jesus says, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations..." (28:18-19).

2. *Under the Spirit's anointing, Messiah would advance His reign not by force or militance, but by God's favor.*

Vs. 19 says, "*He will not quarrel, nor cry out; nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets.*" While He would speak truth and defend the truth, His ministry would not be characterized by loud uprisings and insurrection (or public revolts). Jesus didn't go looking for fights. He would quietly go about the Father's work and only spar with His opponents when it was necessary to defend truth. This is why Jesus withdrew from the Pharisees (14). The focal point of His ministry was not resisting His opponents, but serving His Father and living under His favor as the chosen, beloved, recipient of God's affection.

3. *Under the Spirit's anointing, Messiah would advance justice from a heart of compassion.*

Vs. 20 says, "*A battered reed He will not break off, and a smoldering wick He will not put out, until He leads justice to victory.*" Reeds had many uses in the ancient world such as building materials, but once they were broken down, they were of no value. The idea here is that Jesus does not discard the broken and the weak. He has compassion on them.

A smoldering wick no longer has a flame, just a suffocating spark that will soon go out if not fanned back into flame. And anywhere Jesus found a spark of faith, He honored it. His vast ministry of healing was among broken reeds and smoldering wicks. He didn't walk over the weak to get to the strong. If anything, He confronted the strong to rescue the weak. A day will come when Jesus will bring justice to complete victory (20), but until then you will find Him ministering among the weak and broken, pouring out the Father's compassion. His is a ministry of rest and restoration to those humble enough to be rescued by grace.

This is your Messiah! Strong enough to make justice victorious to the ends of the earth. Compassionate enough, to give hope and rest to all who will trust in Him. Jesus' divine authority is like a giant oak that gives shade and refuge to all who come to Him with trusting faith. But for those who refuse to come or even seek to cut it down, it will one day fall on them with the violent death-blow of all its weight.

This is why its so important for you to choose what God has chosen, to treasure what God cherishes, and to find pleasure in what pleases God, namely His Son. He's life to those who love Him. He's death to those who reject Him.

The tragedy of the Pharisees' blindness is that in their resentment of Jesus, they rejected what God had chosen. They hated what God loves and delights in. They sought to destroy what pleases God most. And in doing so they proved that they did not know God, love God, or recognize the Spirit's anointing. In fact, as we will see next week, they will attribute the Spirit's anointing power on Jesus to the work of the devil—the worst accusation to ever be made in the history of mankind.

My friends, the gospel is a call to turn from our sin and rebellion against God. But its more than that. It's a call to choose and supremely love and

delight in what God chooses to supremely love and delight in—namely, His Son!

Let's take a moment to just soak in vs. 18, in the Father's supreme delight in His Son, and then consider how this empowers us to live like Christ.

“Behold”...give attention to, fix your eyes and affections on...

“My Servant”: this is not the typical word for servant, but one that could also be translated *Son*. It is a term of deep affection. In this case, it is not a servant who is loved like a son, but a Son who is His acting Servant.

“Behold, My Servant-Son, whom I have chosen.” God did not survey all the Jewish candidates for Messiah and choose Mary's Son.¹ Jesus was the eternally chosen One, meaning that of all that has ever existed, He is the apple of the Father's eye, His choice delight.

“Behold, My Servant-Son, who I have chosen; My *beloved*...” Everything that God loves is peripheral to His supreme love for His Son, His *beloved*, because *in Him His soul delights*. Jesus is the deepest enjoyment of God's soul! Why? Because God, being infinitely perfect, pure, beautiful, and glorious, could only find His most rapturous joy in that which matches His nature and standard of infinite perfection, purity, beauty and glory. And this He sees in His Son who is the reflection and very substance of God's own perfection, purity, beauty, and glory.

So how does this empower us to live like Christ? It's this very reality that enabled Jesus to live free of sin. He was satisfied in the Father's satisfaction in Him. So often our battle against sin is not only affected by how we view God but in our ability to see how God views us in His Son.

As human beings, we have a very strong propensity to interpret the quality of our lives by how we think other people see us (which, by the way, is a completely exhausting way to live).

¹ John Piper, 4-15-84 Sermon: “*The Spirit is Upon Him Gently for Now*” (Matt 12:18-21). www.desiringgod.org.

On the one hand we are prone to fall into sin because we love the praise of men, which is a form of the fear of man. We want to make a good impression on people and do what we can to avoid embarrassment. On the other hand, we have a strong tendency to be overly sensitive and self-defensive. All of these (praise of men, fear of man, and self-defensiveness) are forms of pride.

Yet Jesus, in His deep, unshakable humility never sinned in these ways. In fact, we see evidence of it in Matthew 12. Rather than taking personal offense and being self-defensive toward the Pharisees, He simply withdrew. In stead of taking advantage of His popularity with the crowds, He delayed notoriety, warning them to not broadcast who He was.

He was not driven by people's impression of Him, whether positive or negative, because the fountainhead of His life was His Father's view of Him. He knew that He was His Father's Servant-Son, chosen, beloved, and the very well-spring of His soul's deepest delight. So He was able to quietly and compassionately go about his Father's will, neither bristled nor flattered by people.

Let me conclude with some summary points of application:

1. ***We will treasure Jesus supremely when we see Him as the Father's supreme joy.*** Not just the one who bails us out of our sin. Not just the one who can do miraculous things. But one who is so infinitely perfect, pure, beautiful and glorious that He makes even the Father's heart rapturous with joy.
2. ***When by faith we become one with Christ, we become partakers in the delight and favor the Father lavishes on His beloved Son and receive the very Spirit with which He was anointed.*** When I became one with my bride, my dad lavished on her the very love and affection he has for me as his son. He saw her through the eyes of favor he has for me. And that is how God sees you as His bride, through the eyes of favor reserved for His Son.

3. ***A Spirit-filled life of abiding in Christ, will result in the humility, gentleness, compassion and self-control that stands for truth and justice just as Christ did.*** The compassion that He always stands ready to give us in our brokenness.
4. ***The fountain of your life as a believer is God's favor toward you as His chosen and beloved in Christ.*** This is your new identity. Your oneness with Christ ensures God's favor on you. **Therefore, you can live your life free of the praise and fear of man.** No longer self-defensive, no longer seeking to impress, because you have God's approval by virtue of your union with Christ.

In other words, if you are in Christ, the Father smiles on you. So you don't have to get up in the morning and wonder if God is pleased with you or not. On a cloudy day, not only is it hard to see the Sun, it is also difficult to perceive how the Sun is shining down on us. In a similar way, if your identity in Christ is cloudy, if its not clear to you, then you will struggle to live in light of God's favor on you in Christ.

So cast off the clouds of sin that hinder your ability to bask in the Sunshine of God's grace and favor.

Father, we are amazed, speechless, that you would share with us the very love and affection You have for Your perfect Son, simply because are His bride, one with Him, dressed in His righteousness. Oh Lord, may we stop seeking to be satisfied by lesser things, and rest in the deep satisfaction of Your love and acceptance in Christ.