

## **The Gentleness And Compassion Of The King**

By: Sam Mikhael

Isaiah describes the Lord Jesus Christ as Jehovah's perfect servant in four classic songs (Isaiah 42; 49; 50; 52:13-53:12.) Matthew 12 quotes the first one to make the point that this Anointed One has not come to destroy men's lives by making their lives burdensome rounds of endless religious drudgery. In contrast to the rabbis of His day, Christ would not dominate people. The Scripture reveals a different side of Messiah, saying: "A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench" (Matt. 12:20; cf. Isa. 42:3.) Matthew, in chapter 12 of his gospel, not only quotes this verse from Isaiah but illustrates this description of the Lord Jesus' gentleness and compassion by detailing His deliverance of two men who were pitifully afflicted by the consequences of living in a sinful, fallen world.

### **Case #1: The Man With A Withered Hand**

The synagogue at Capernaum had some interesting congregants in Christ's day: early in His ministry the Lord healed a demon possessed man there (Mk. 1:21-27.) The Pharisees and the Sadducees were unsuccessful in ridding their gathering of disabled and desperate people. Matthew 12 shines the spotlight on a man with a "withered" hand. Some translations describe it as "shriveled" (NIV'11.) This description likely indicates paralysis - as in Jeroboam's case in 1 Kings 13:4. In that case, the apostate King Jeroboam son of Nebat was afflicted with a shriveled hand to set forth the supremacy of Jehovah, who sent the man of God to prophesy against the idolatrous altar at Bethel (1 Kgs. 13:1-10.) The New Testament also renders the same word "dry" to indicate the future result of Israel's national rejection of Christ (Lk. 23:31.) Their spiritual desiccation would lead to increasing outrages against the truth until their future restoration to the Lord (see Zech. 12:10-13:1.)

This afflicted man's presence indicated the tragedy of Christless religion: the leaders of the synagogue were unmoved by his disability - one which likely made ordinary physical employment difficult, if not impossible. In their preoccupation with the human traditions that their ancestors and they added to the Scripture, they completely lost sight of compassion in the face of suffering. They were more than willing to crush a "bruised reed" by their merciless and proud devotion to their self-promoting ceremonies. But Isaiah asserted that "a bruised reed" - like this damaged man - "shall He not break."

### **Case #2: The Demon-Possessed Blind And Mute Man**

Matthew 12 further authenticates the Lord Jesus' messianic credentials with the story of His healing of a blind and mute man.<sup>1</sup> Like the previously mentioned disabled man this fellow existed in sheer misery, completely unrelieved and uncared for by the religious establishment. Undoubtedly, the man's "quality of life" would not measure up in the eyes of the "brave new world" that advocates euthanizing those who have severe physical or mental handicaps. Yet Christ views him as a person with value, and immediately heals

him. In keeping with Isaiah's prophecy, "smoking flax shall He not quench": the barest spark of humanity left to this demonically oppressed man would not be callously extinguished by the Lord. Instead, He rekindles the flame, and restores the man to normal life.

### **To God There Are No Disposable People**

The Lord did not trample people in His quest to establish the kingdom of God on earth. Nor did He throw away people as valueless pawns, if they were perceived useless to His cause. As Isaiah notes, He will ". . . send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust" (Matt. 12:20-21.) But He will accomplish this through His saving grace. As Spurgeon declared: "The power which Christ uses for the spread of his kingdom is exercised in conversion, and is as different as possible from compulsion or clamor. Conversion is the mysterious work of the Spirit upon the soul. That great change could not be produced by the fear of imprisonment, the authority of law, the charms of bribery, the clamor of excitement, or the glitter of eloquence. Men have pretended to conversion because they hoped that a religious profession would benefit their trade, or raise their social position, but from such conversions may God deliver us. Men have been startled into thoughtfulness by the excitement which arises out of Christian zeal; but any real spiritual benefit they may have received has come to them from another source, for the Lord is not in the wind, or the tempest, but in the still small voice."<sup>2</sup>

A bruised reed, gives evidence to the harm done to humanity by sin and smoking flax, the faintest remnant of that humanity, instilled by God, within each of us. Indeed marred, as we all are before God, yet He has power to deliver from the ravages that Satan and sin inflict on human lives. In this fallen world there is no shortage of people that are physically, mentally, and spiritually afflicted. What a blessing it is to see that the King of kings is merciful and offers compassion rather than oppression. No matter how seemingly hopeless the person, He is willing and able to save.

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<sup>1</sup> As Henry remarks: "A soul under Satan's power, and led captive by him, is blind in the things of God, and dumb at the throne of grace; sees nothing, and says nothing to the purpose. Satan blinds the eye of faith, and seals up the lips of prayer." Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1673.

<sup>2</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, "The Gentleness of Jesus," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, Vol. 19. (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1873), 703.