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ISAIAH 42:2-4

(THE SERVANT OF THE LORD – WHAT HE IS LIKE)

INTRODUCTION

This week we continue our study of Isaiah chapter 42 and the SERVANT OF THE LORD of whom it speaks. You will recall that Isaiah in chapter 40 (40:9) called upon the people of God to **“BEHOLD YOUR GOD.”** Then in chapter 41 (41:29) Isaiah called upon both the nations and the people of God to **“BEHOLD”** the VANITY and NOTHINGNESS of the idols. Now in chapter 42 (42:1) God through Isaiah calls for another, a third BEHOLDING. In Isaiah 42:1 we read, **“BEHOLD MY SERVANT.”** The people are now being called to BEHOLD GOD’S SERVANT. And the immediate question becomes who is this **“SERVANT”** that the people are called to BEHOLD? And the answer is that this is GOD’S ULTIMATE SERVANT. It is Christ that Isaiah is speaking of. And that Isaiah is passing over all time between that of himself and the appearing of Christ in these words - is evident by the reference to them in the Gospel of Matthew, and the application of them in Matthew to Christ. In Matthew 12:16-21 we read,

“AND CHARGED THEM THAT THEY SHOULD NOT MAKE HIM KNOWN:

THAT IT MIGHT BE FULFILLED WHICH WAS SPOKEN BY ESAIAS THE PROPHET, SAYING,

BEHOLD MY SERVANT, WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN; MY BELOVED, IN WHOM MY SOUL IS WELL PLEASSED: I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM, AND HE SHALL SHEW JUDGEMENT TO THE GENTILES.

HE SHALL NOT STRIVE, NOR CRY; NEITHER SHALL ANY MAN HEAR HIS VOICE IN THE STREETS.

A BRUISED REED SHALL HE NOT BREAK, AND SMOKING FLAX SHALL HE NOT QUENCH, TILL HE SEND FORTH JUDGEMENT UNTO VICTORY.

AND IN HIS NAME SHALL THE GENTILES TRUST.”

Matthew makes clear in these words that the one who Isaiah is speaking concerning in Isaiah 42 is indeed the Lord Jesus Christ.

Last week, in our opening message on chapter 42, we noted that Isaiah in verses 1-4 tells us THREE THINGS concerning Christ as the SERVANT OF THE LORD. FIRST, WHO HE IS. SECOND, WHAT HE IS LIKE. And THIRD, WHAT HAS HE COME TO DO.

Of these THREE MATTERS we also, in last week’s message, in VERSE ONE, looked closely the FIRST of them and the matter of WHO THE SERVANT OF THE LORD is. We saw FIVE THINGS in respect to this.

1. He is the SERVANT OF THE LORD – **“MY SERVANT”**
2. He is the ONE who is SPECIALLY UPHOLD BY THE LORD – **“WHOM I UPHOLD”**
3. He is the CHOSEN OF THE LORD – **“MINE ELECT”**
4. He is the BELOVED OF THE LORD – **“IN WHOM MY SOUL DELIGHTETH”**

5. He is the ONE WHO IS FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD – **“I HAVE PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM”**

This week in verses 2-4 we are going to consider the SECOND of these three matters, WHAT THE SERVANT OF THE LORD IS LIKE.

We begin the message this morning with the reading of our text.

TEXT

“HE SHALL NOT CRY, NOR LIFT UP, NOR CAUSE HIS VOICE TO BE HEARD IN THE STREET.

A BRUISED REED SHALL HE NOT BREAK, AND THE SMOKING FLAX SHALL HE NOT QUENCH: HE SHALL BRING FORTH JUDGMENT UNTO TRUTH.

HE SHALL NOT FAIL NOR BE DISCOURAGED, TILL HE HAVE SET JUDGMENT UNTO TRUTH.”

In these words, God through the prophet Isaiah tells us WHAT THE SERVANT OF THE LORD IS LIKE. Let us now consider the MEANING of his words here, the MEANING OF THE TEXT.

EXPLANATION AND MEANING OF THE TEXT

In the words of our text there are THREE PRINCIPAL THINGS which are told us concerning WHAT the SERVANT OF THE LORD is like.

The FIRST OF these is seen in verse 2. **“HE SHALL NOT CRY, NOR LIFT UP, NOR CAUSE HIS VOICE TO BE HEARD IN THE STREET.”**

Note, there are THREE NEGATIVE VERBS here and they DESCRIBE the UNOSTENTATIOUS and UNOBTRUSIVE way in which the SERVANT OF THE LORD ***WILL SPEAK AND TEACH***. The SERVANT OF THE LORD is not going to speak in a manner to IMPRESS or ATTRACT NOTICE. He is not going to speak in a manner that calls attention to Himself, that makes Him conspicuous. In His ministry He is going to be HUMBLE and LOWLY, NOT loud, and boisterous. His teaching will be accomplished through quiet instruction not loud proclamation. He is TRULY coming as a SERVANT, in meekness and lowliness. And is this not what our Lord tells us concerning Himself in Matthew 11:28-30.

Also, in Matthew 12:14-21 when our Lord tells the people not to make Him known, it is in response to the Pharisees taking council against Him. Matthew in quoting Isaiah in this place uses the word **“STRIVE”** in speaking of the manner of our Lord’s teaching and ministering. Matthew is indicating that Isaiah’s prophecy concerning our Lord, and as He reports in the actions of our Lord, is going to be one in which Christ does not CONTEND, ARGUE, STRIVE AGAINST the Pharisees. He is not going to **“STRIVE”** with them in a VIOLENT TYPE OF DEBATE or DISPUTE. Christ is not going to CRY OUT, OR LIFT UP, OR RAISE HIS VOICE IN THE STREETS in His teaching and ministry and in response to those who reject and oppose Him.

In verse 3 we are told the SECOND thing concerning WHAT THE SERVANT OF THE LORD IS LIKE.

“A BRUISED REED SHALL HE NOT BREAK, AND THE SMOKING FLAX SHALL HE NOT QUENCH: HE SHALL BRING FORTH JUDGEMENT UNTO TRUTH.”

“A BRUISED REED” grows in a marsh or on a riverbank. It is by its very nature weak. And here it is spoken of as being “BRUISED.” A bruised reed is double weak. Weak by nature and weak by being harmed in some sense. The natural thing to do with a bruised reed is to break it. In Isaiah’s imagery the “BRUISED REED” is representative of a PERSON WHO IS WEAK AND WOUNDED. One who will easily break, and collapse under pressure. Natural rulers do the natural thing, they break such. But the SERVANT OF THE LORD, “A BRUISED REED SHALL HE NOT BREAK.” Rather He takes pity upon it and acts to support and strengthen it. He deals GENTLY with it.

“THE SMOKING FLAX” is a wick that is burning and nearly extinguished. Again, the natural thing would be to extinguish it. As with the bruised reed “THE SMOKING FLAX” is symbolical. It is symbolical of persons who are DISCOURAGED, DISILLUSIONED, CAST DOWN, those who have LOST HOPE in life. Natural men and rulers again, do the natural thing with such people. They disregard them, extinguish them as it were. But THE SERVANT OF THE LORD, “THE SMOKING FLAX SHALL HE NOT QUENCH.” Rather Christ ENCOURAGES, LIFTS UP SUCH. He fans the flickering, smoldering wick till it once again burns bright.

The final words of verse 3 speak of the SUCCESS of the SERVANT OF THE LORD and the MEANS by which He accomplishes it, “TRUTH.” The words, “HE SHALL BRING FORTH JUDGEMENT UNTO TRUTH,” speak of the “SERVANT OF THE LORD” successfully bringing SALVATION to those to whom He ministers and doing it in, and by TRUTH.

The SERVANT OF THE LORD will with GENTLENESS, ENCOURAGEMENT, and TRUTH bring salvation to the WEAK, BROKEN, LOWLY, DISCOURAGED, DOWNCAST, DISILLUSIONED, and HOPELESS.

In verse 4 we are told the THIRD thing concerning what the SERVANT OF THE LORD is like.

“HE SHALL NOT FAIL NOR BE DISCOURAGED, TILL HE HAVE SET JUDGEMENT IN THE EARTH: AND THE ISLES SHALL WAIT FOR HIS LAW.”

In these words, we are told that the SERVANT OF THE LORD is ONE WHO WILL NOT WEAKEN, HE WILL NOT BE EXTINGUISHED LIKE A SMOKING FLAX, and HE IS ONE WHO WILL NOT BE BROKEN OR CRUSHED LIKE A BRUISED REED. Isaiah connects what has been said concerning those to whom the Lord ministers with the Lord Himself. Notice also, there is a gradation here. In verse two there were three negative verbs and no mention of the completion of the SERVANTS WORK. In verse 3 there are two negative verbs and a statement of the successful outcome of our Lord’s work. In verse 4 there are two negative verbs and a statement of the SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION of our Lord’s work ALONG WITH AN ADDITIONAL STATEMENT concerning the EXPECTANCY of the “ISLES” or distant lands, nations, and peoples, for the teaching and ministry of the SERVANT OF THE LORD.

Thus, Isaiah tells us that the SERVANT OF THE LORD will be unlike others. That He will in GENTLENESS, ENCOURAGEMENT, TRUTH, and WITH PERSEVERANCE, WITHOUT BEING EXTINGUISHED OR BROKEN BRING SALVATION TO THE WEAK, BROKEN, LOWLY, DISCOURAGED, DISILLUSIONED, HOPELESS, AND EVEN TO THOSE IN THE MOST DISTANT LANDS, WHO WAIT FOR TRUTH AND RIGHTEOUSNESS.

THEOLOGICAL MESSAGE AND PERSONAL APPLICATION OF THE TEXT

Having understood the MEANING and GENERAL MESSAGE of these words of Isaiah we now consider their more PARTICULAR THEOLOGICAL MESSAGE, their more DIRECT and PERSONAL MESSAGE to us today.

To this end, please observe the following.

FIRST, from verse three, note that those with whom Christ has to deal are LIKE **“BRUISED REEDS.”** They are NOT TREES but REEDS. And as REEDS they are BRUISED REEDS. In this Christ Church is COMPARED to WEAK THINGS. The Church is like a DOVE among the birds, a VINE among the plants, and a SHEEP among the animals.

Those in the church of Christ are **“BRUISED REEDS”** both, BEFORE and AFTER, their CONVERSION. They are bruised reeds BEFORE CONVERSION in DIFFERENT DEGREES, and in DIFFERENT RESPECTS as God sees fit. This is seen in regard to their physical being, their temperament, their manner of life and more. Further, GOD ALSO, BEFORE CONVERSION, EMPTIES ALL OF THEMSELVES that He brings to Himself.

As a **“BRUISED REED”** BEFORE CONVERSION a man is PUT, in some MATTER or MANNER in a FORM OF MISERY. And by this misery is brought to SEE SIN AS THE CAUSE OF IT. And this BRUISING is REQUIRED BEFORE CONVERSION in order that the Holy Spirit might make room for Himself in a person’s heart. And this is accomplished by bringing down and levelling all that is higher in one’s heart than it should be. And in this, enabling us to see what we truly are by nature. Was not this the experience of the prodigal son in the far country - that led to what is recorded concerning him in Luke 15:17, **“AND WHEN HE CAME TO HIMSELF.”** And in this, do we not see what a HARD THING it is to bring a person TO CRY WITH FEELING FOR THE MERCY OF SALVATION. Further, this BRUISING IS NECESSARY in order for one to rightly ESTEEM CHRIST AND TO SEE THE GREAT NEED OF HIM IN SALVATION. AND, further still, this BRUISING ESTABLISHES US MORE IN HIS WAYS in that He MAKES it ABUNDANTLY CLEAR to us that our ways lead to BRUISING, HURT and HARM. Consider, IT IS THE LACK OF SUCH BRUISING that is often the cause of backsliding and falling away. Those who have not SUFFICIENTLY SMARTED for their sin are apt to return to it. Those whom God effectually and permanently draws to Himself are not spared from this smarting.

But as well those who are Christ’s are as a **“BRUISED REED”** AFTER CONVERSION. This is in order, as one has said, that reeds may know they are reeds and not oaks. As reeds we need bruising after conversion and that BECAUSE OF THE REMAINDER OF PRIDE IN OUR NATURE, and to help us to see that WE LIVE BY MERCY (Matthew 4:4; I Corinthians 4:7). Thus, was Peter bruised when he wept bitterly because of his denial of Christ, (Matthew 26:75). Consider him before this. In Matthew 26:35 we read, **“PETER SAID UNTO HIM, THOUGH I SHOULD DIE WITH THEE, YET WILL I NOT DENY THEE...”** And was it not necessary that the apostle Paul be humbled. We read his words in II Corinthians 12:7, **“AND LEST I SHOULD BE EXALTED ABOVE MEASURE THROUGH THE ABUNDANCE OF REVELATIONS, THERE WAS GIVEN TO ME A THORN IN THE FLESH, THE MESSENGER OF SATAN TO BUFFET ME, LEST I SHOULD BE EXALTED ABOVE**

MEASURE.” And in the Old Testament was not David so bruised (Psalms 32:3-5), and Hezekiah (Isaiah 38:9-13). But further, REEDS NEED BRUISING to the end that WEAKER CHRISTIANS may not be discouraged. When the WEAK see the strong shaken and bruised, that they to fail and fall, they are more comforted than when they see their heroic deeds. Is this not also seen in the bruising of Peter, Paul, David, and Hezekiah. And may we not add the bruising of Job and the prophets to this list as seen in James 5:10-11.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion this morning, may we be careful not to be overly critical of ourselves, or others, when God does exercise His own with bruising. Indeed, there are times when God does exercise those who are His with bruising upon bruising. And this in order that we might TRULY be conformed to the image of Christ. Is not this the message of Romans 8:28-29. Are not the **“ALL THINGS”** of verse 28 inclusive of the BRUISING of the Lord. And further, is not our bruising necessary to be conformed to Him who was bruised for us, Isaiah 53:5, **“BUT HE WAS WOUNDED FOR OUR TRANSGRESSIONS, HE WAS BRUISED FOR OUR INIQUITIES...”**

Consider, that it is IGNORANCE OF GOD’S WAYS and a PROFANE SPIRIT, a non-SACREDNESS, that does not recognize the BRUISING OF THE LORD as GOD’S WAY in bringing His children to heaven. That does not recognize that the BRUISING OF THE LORD is a precursor to a GRACIOUS and GOOD WORK OF GOD. Again, it is no easy matter to bring a man from NATURE to GRACE, and from GRACE to GLORY.

There is much more to be opened in these words of the prophet PRACTICALLY, that are of importance and encouragement to us His children. But this morning may we EARNESTLY CONSIDER the TRUTH that has been declared and OUR RELATION TO IT, INDEED OUR EXPERIENCE OF IT.

Are there not some here this morning who the Lord in this way, and at this time, is calling to Himself. And are there not some of us with whom God is presently so dealing in order to further, and truly conform us to the image of Christ, - and in order that the life of Christ might be more fully manifest in us.

If the Lord is so calling you to Himself this morning, resist no more, fight no longer, but yield to the Lord’s call, come to Him in real repentance and sincere faith.

And if our Lord is so sanctifying you this morning, be thankful, for it is a PRECURSOR TO GREATER FRUITFULNESS.

LET US PRAY.