

## Christ, the Tender Preserver of His People

The Gospel of Matthew starts with the record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ in Mt1: 1-16. There is a real genealogy of a real Jesus Christ. Throughout the gospel of Matthew we have an accurate, though not exhaustive, and not always perfectly chronological, record of the life, the ministry, the teaching, the death, the resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, what we have in the gospel of Matthew, is a real, substantive, biographical account, of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus. We have a biographical record under the direction of the Holy Spirit with reference to the life, death and ascension of our Lord Jesus. This very account of the historical facts as they relate to Jesus of Nazareth closes in Mt. 28:20 with these words "Lo, I am with you always even until the consummation of the age." Here we have a record of the words of Jesus promising that He will be with His people always, literally, each and every day, even to the consummation of the age.

The real, historical, biographical record of the life and ministry of Jesus is found at the beginning and, at the end of the gospel of Matthew, it closes with this promise of the abiding presence of the very Jesus whose record is given to us in this gospel. Here we have, in this combination of Mt 1:1 and Mt 28:20, one of the most amazing and encouraging declarations of what lies at the very center of the Christian faith. We have a record of how He related to the full spectrum of humanity –in all of its complexity of need. This record concludes with this marvelous promise, that this very Jesus, by the presence and ministry of the Spirit, is with us –not to be admired from a distance, not to be longed after, not to be filling His people with nostalgia, but in the spirit of faith to fill them with confidence, that all that He is, as He is displayed in the gospel records, He is to the end of the age, in the presence of His people, "Lo, I am with you always even to the end."

We would not grasp the promise of His presence without a gospel account of what He was like, how He related to the downcast, how He dealt with those of

weak faith, how He dealt with the outcast of society, how He dealt with the religious proud and the smug. If all we had was just a promise of His presence, and had no biographical record of what He is like, it could only fill us with a mystic sense that he is somehow, in some way or another, with us, but precisely how He is with us and how He relates to us concerning those questions, we would know nothing. Since God has given to us this fusion of an accurate biographical record (Mt.1 ) joined to the promise of an ever-abiding presence (Mt.28:20) the Christian has all that the human heart can yearn for in relationship to the Lord Jesus. That reality is the background and the framework of Mt 12:20.

In Matthew 12 we have an accurate record of Our Lord's two encounters with the Pharisees – controversies over His activities and the activities of His disciples on the Jewish Sabbath. In Mt 12:1-8 our Lord defends the actions of His disciples when they take some grain to satisfy their hunger. In verses 9-13 our Lord heals on the Sabbath and the Pharisees are upset with Jesus for this. Jesus defends His actions and His disciples' actions. When He is done with these two defenses –of what, in the estimation of the Pharisees, was a breaking of their Sabbath rules, not God's rules– they are so frustrated (verse 14) they took counsel how they might destroy Him.

It's in that setting that we read Mt. 12:15. "And Jesus perceiving it withdrew from thence: and many followed Him; and He healed them all, <sup>16</sup> and charged them that they should not make Him known: <sup>17</sup> that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah (42:1-4) the prophet, saying, <sup>18</sup> 'Behold, My servant whom I have chosen; My beloved in whom My soul is well pleased: I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He shall declare judgment to the Gentiles. <sup>19</sup> He shall not strive, nor cry aloud; neither shall any one hear His voice in the streets. <sup>20</sup> A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench, till He send forth judgment unto victory. <sup>21</sup> And in His Name shall the Gentiles hope."

Our focus will be on verse 20. As the Lord Jesus withdraws from the Pharisees, who are taking counsel how they might destroy Him, and as He is engaged in the work of healing multitudes and charging them not to emblazon abroad what He has done, but to be reserved and restrained in declaring His mighty works, Matthew under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, says His actions at this time were a direct fulfillment of what was prophesied of the Servant of Jehovah, by the prophet Isaiah 800 years prior to the events recorded. Matthew says what was prophesied of Jesus in Isaiah 42: 1-4 is now being fulfilled in Jesus. While the primary emphasis of the passage falls upon His restraint in sending out those who were healed as noisy ambassadors of His credentials (Jesus solemnly charges them not to make Him known because He was to accomplish His mighty work, His Divine mission, not through the ostentatious method of the worldly leaders, but by the sheer power and grace that rested upon Him by the Holy Spirit), Jesus can be expected to act in a certain way, and we are told in verse 20, in the accomplishment of that mission, "A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench." This statement, extracted from the prophesy of Isaiah, which Matthew says is now being fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus, for in His promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the consummation of the age," we are given adequate grounds to think of the Jesus who is with us, as perfectly suited, as perfectly fulfilling this description.

Let's consider the passage in these ways as we work our way through it:

A) THE IMAGERY EMPLOYED

B) THE TRUTH CONVEYED BY THAT IMAGERY

C) THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE TRUTH DECLARED

**A) THE IMAGERY EMPLOYED**

Isaiah's prophecy spoke of how Jesus would deal with "bruised reeds" and "smoking flax". The prophet is speaking in figurative language. Let's look at the imagery employed and to what it is referring.

**i) A bruised reed shall He not break.**

The reed is a hollow, tall, but fragile water plant found abundantly around rivers and lakes. You don't use figures of speech that don't bridge in the minds of people to whom you are communicating –from the known to the unknown. You don't use figures of speech that make no sense. That's confusing matters, not clarifying them, so these people, to whom Matthew was writing, were familiar with these thin hollow water plants. They were a common commodity to the people in Palestine.

A bruised reed is a reed that, somewhere along that hollow stalk, it had been bruised and, being bruised, it had, to some degree, been bent at the point of its bruising. The bruised reed is no longer useful. Reeds in that day were used as measuring rods. If it appeared that the reed was not going to be useful –it was already bruised and bent– it was broken off. To break a reed, one would simply take the part that is bent, bring it down once, then up again, and it snaps off. It is easy to break the bruised reed and cast it off. Now, it says when Jesus, the Servant of Jehovah, encounters a bruised reed, He will not break it –"A bruised reed shall He not break . . ."

In the biographical accounts of the gospels, when Jesus, the Servant of Jehovah, came upon a bruised reed, in the accomplishment of His messianic mission, He did not do the thing that would be very easy to do –break the reed.

**ii) Smoking flax**

Flax puts us in the realm of plant life again. Flax came from a plant, the stalk of which had fibers which could be woven into what we now call linen. In Biblical times that particular plant, and the fibers from the stem, would be woven into various materials for various uses and one of them was to make wicks for oil lamps. When those fibers were woven together into a wick, they would be placed into a bowl-like vessel that held oil and the flax served as the wick for the lamp. Now, it says "a smoking flax He will not quench." When the supply of oil ran low, the flax itself would begin to burn, and when it did, the smoke would send off an acrid smell

that was a signal – more oil was needed. When the wick got to the place where it would smoke, someone would come along and clip off part of that smoking wick, that still had a little bit of the embers, to quench the fire. They would pull off the burnt part, pull out more of the flax, and then reignite the flax. It is said of the Servant of Jehovah, "smoking flax He will not quench," and that's the common word for putting out fire. When Jesus spoke of hell being a place of unquenchable fire, there's that word. It's the word used in Mt 25:8, "our lamps have gone out, our fires have been quenched." Eph 6:16, "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked."

So the Servant of Jehovah, as surely as He will never break the bruised reed, He will never put out the little remaining flickering embers of that smoking flax in that little oil lamp. He will never quench that flax, rather, He will nurture it, He will do whatever is necessary to have it burn brightly, again.

So the Servant of Jehovah, in His ministry, is One who would never do what is illustrated in this snapping of the bruised reed and this extinguishing of the flickering fire in a smoking, oil-starved flax wick.

With the imagery explained, what is the truth conveyed by that imagery?

#### **B) THE TRUTH CONVEYED BY THAT IMAGERY**

As surely as we know from the prophecy of Isaiah –that the One who was the Son given, the One who was the child born, would be the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace– we know with certainty, that in the accomplishment of His Messianic task, He will never break the bruised reed and He will never quench the smoking flax. What truth is conveyed in that imagery? Negatively stated - it is this; the person whose spiritual condition is weak, flagging, and vulnerable (like the bruised reed), whose spiritual condition is such that it is waning in the fire of devotion and zeal (like the smoking flax), such a one will neither be crushed, nor quenched by Jesus. It's a statement framed in the negative and that's the way it comes to us in the text: "A bruised reed shall He not break, and a

smoking flax shall He not quench." So when it is said of the Servant of Jehovah, the bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench, we should understand from this, the positive affirmation that the person whose spiritual condition is weak, flagging, and vulnerable as the bruised reed, whose zeal and whose love and whose faith and whose repentance is well obscured in the smoky wick of spiritual dullness and barrenness, most assuredly, the Lord Jesus will never break off and cast away that believer who is like a bruised reed, nor extinguish that almost-imperceptible fire of spiritual life in the one who is like a wick of smoking flax.

Bishop John Charles Ryle, in his Expository Thoughts, beautifully states this perspective in summary form.:

"What are we to understand by the bruised reed and the smoking flax? The language of the prophet no doubt is figurative. What is it that these two expressions mean? What is the truth conveyed in the imagery? The simplest explanation seems to be, that the Holy Spirit is here describing persons whose grace is at present weak, whose repentance is feeble, and whose faith is small. Towards such persons, the Lord Jesus Christ will be very tender and compassionate. Weak as the broken reed is, it shall not be broken. Small as the spark of fire may be within the smoking flax, it shall not be quenched. It is a standing truth in the kingdom of grace, that weak grace, weak faith, and weak repentance are yet precious in the Lord's sight."

Now if that is the proper understanding of what Matthew says is presently being fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus, then we should expect when we read through the Gospel record concerning how Jesus dealt with those of weak faith, those with weak repentance, those with but a dull, little speck of zeal and fire and courage of devotion to Him, then we should see Jesus dealing in such a way that we could immediately make the connection and say, 'Yes, there's a bruised reed. Jesus is in the presence of a bruised reed.' What will He do with

it? Will He break it? Here is a smoldering, smoking, flax wick. It is acrid with the smell of the smoke. There is very little discernible fire. What will Jesus do? Will He clip it off? or will He so deal with that smoldering, smoking wick that it once again burns brightly?

If you have any acquaintance with the Gospel records, you know that the Lord Jesus deals precisely in this way with one after another, after another.

In Matthew 11 there is a beautiful example of a bruised reed and of a smoking flax and it's interesting because this is a man of whom Jesus spoke, and said, he was a burning and a shining light. That's how Jesus referred to John the Baptist, but in Matthew 11:2, we read, "Now when John heard in the prison the works of the Christ, he sent by his disciples and said unto Him, "Are you He that comes, or do we look for another?"

Now think about it. This is the one who was the forerunner of Jesus, whose devotion to Jesus even predated His birth. When Mary came into the presence of Elizabeth, John the Baptist reacted while in his mother's womb. The babe leaped in her womb in the presence of his Lord. He was filled with the Spirit from his mother's womb. It was he, of whom it is said in John 1, that when he saw Jesus coming, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is He of whom I spoke saying the One who comes after me is before me. I'm not worthy to unloose His sandals. I baptize in water, but He shall baptize in the Holy Spirit and in fire." It was John who points to Christ, who speaks of Christ, who rejoices when people come and try to stir him up to jealousy, and say, 'John, everybody's going away from you and after Him.' It's recorded that John rejoiced and said, 'What makes the friend of the bridegroom happy? When all the attention is placed on the bridegroom, not on the best man. I'm just the best man. Now that all the attention is focused on the bridegroom who's come, I rejoice.' In Matthew 11:7, Jesus said of John, "What went you out into the wilderness to see, a reed shaking in the wind?" Jesus here is saying, 'Not John, none greater among those born of women than John. He's not a reed. He's a cedar

in Lebanon. Let the winds howl, let the opposition come like a gale. This is no reed shaken in the wind.'

John the Baptist is the burning flame and the shining light, but now look at him. John is in prison. Look at him now and contrast him to the John the Baptist we read about in Matthew 3. John questions, "Are you He that should come, or do we look for Another?" He's a bruised reed. His faith, his confidence has been shaken. He's a smoking flax. "Are you He, or do we look for Another?" He said this after he heard of all His miracles. Strange thing; you would think if there would have been a period where Jesus wasn't doing miracles that John might have said, 'are you the one that should come,' but the text says, "When John heard of the works of Christ, he sent by his disciples, whom said, Are you He that comes, or do we look for Another?" Surely, if ever, anyone was a just candidate to be rebuked for sinful forgetfulness, for unbelief, for unfounded timidity, it was John at this point. But how does Jesus deal with him? In Matthew 11, Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the good tidings preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in Me." He says, 'Look, just go back and tell John all the things you see and hear. I have confidence that John knows his Old Testament Scriptures well enough, that when you spread before him, all of the specific credentials of My Messianic identity, he'll remember who I Am. All that he has said about Me and all that he has preached about Me, all that he's known of Me will once again ignite into a flame of present confidence that I Am precisely who he declared Me to be: the Lamb of God, the Son of God, the Promised Messiah. I Am exactly all that he's already preached that I Am. Just go back and tell him.' Then what does the Lord do? Verse 7, . . . and as these went on their way, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John, 'Now here's an example of what happens when you allow unbelief and doubt . . .' No! He doesn't use John as a springboard to give a lesson on the wickedness of unbelief and forgetfulness. He uses the occasion to give just praise, to John. "What did you go out into the



wilderness to behold? A reed shaken with the wind? What did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? What did you go out to see? A prophet? I say, much more than a prophet." Do you see the Lord Jesus fulfilling His identity as the Lord's Servant? This bruised reed, John, He didn't break. This smoking flax, He did not quench.

Go through the Gospel records. Take Peter for instance. Yes, there's a time when the Lord calls him adversary – "Satan get behind Me"– when Peter would stand between the Lord and the Cross, thinking that he is God's appointed means to keep the Son of God from suffering. The Lord says, "Get behind Me, Satan. You're thinking not the thoughts of God, but the thoughts of man." Then, Peter, when he thinks himself to be a cedar in Lebanon, says, "If all forsake you, I'll never forsake you." There comes a point where Peter is a bruised reed, and his own ears cannot deny that they've heard his mouth taking oaths in the presence of others, taking oaths and curses upon himself to affirm he doesn't even know Jesus. What does the Lord do? The Scripture tells us that Jesus looked upon him. The Scripture tells us that Peter called to remembrance the Words of the Lord Jesus and went out and wept bitterly. After our Lord rises from the dead, what does He say? "Go tell My disciples **and Peter.**" 'Peter may think he's cut himself off, but I want him to know I've not cut him off. Tell my disciples, because Peter may think he is the bent and bruised reed and has been broken off and no longer fits the category of disciples. Go tell my disciples and Peter, and Peter.' Then you remember how kindly and graciously He dealt with him after He had prepared breakfast for them by the seaside, as recorded in John's Gospel, chapter 21. "Do you love Me, Peter?" He doesn't say, 'Why did you deny Me? Why did you deny Me?' Peter at that point was so bruised, that such a question from the Lord Jesus would have broken him. His flax was so smoky and so lacking in any discernible fire that such treatment would have quenched whatever remaining love and zeal was there. So the Lord Jesus tenderly deals with that smoking flax called Peter, and Peter says, "Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you." Then the Lord re-commissions him, for each denial; there's the fresh affirmation of His love, and

after it's all over with, the Lord Jesus says, 'My purposes for you have not been sidetracked. You're to feed My sheep. Feed My lambs. Tend My sheep. Peter, you are to follow Me, as My faithful disciple.'

As you go through the Gospel records, you see the Lord Jesus doing this again and again and again. Where there is one of His true people weak in faith, weak in repentance, weak in zeal, they are indeed fitting the imagery of the bruised reed and the smoking flax. He neither breaks the one, nor quenches the other.

So we've considered together the imagery employed, secondly, the truth conveyed by the imagery. Now, thirdly, let's look at the application of this truth.

### C) THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE TRUTH DECLARED

i) Application first to the true people of God.

a) This is a call to worship and to admire such a Savior.

This passage, Matthew 12:18-21, declares the triumph of the mission of the Lord's Servant. Behold, My Servant whom I have chosen; My beloved in whom My soul is well pleased: I will put My Spirit upon Him, He shall declare judgment or justice to the Gentiles. <sup>21</sup>, And in His Name shall the Gentiles hope. There will be such a revelation of His character and works, that even Gentiles shall hope, shall trust. They will place their confidence in this One as He is revealed in the Gospel. In a context where the Servant of Jehovah is set forth as the successful Servant in His mission, yet in the success of that mission, there is nothing of the worldly conqueror, in our Lord Jesus. There is nothing of the worldly method to accomplish His mission. There is nothing of the pattern of the Gentiles. Jesus said among the Gentiles, those that reach the top, are those that lorded down upon others. They climbed to the top over the reputations and over the sensibilities of others. In our Lord Jesus, we see this beautiful balance, this fusion of principled, determined commitment to do the Will of God; unflinching commitment to the Will of His Father, and yet, with gentleness and the tenderness that it can be said that the bruised reed He will never break and the smoking flax He will never quench. In a very

moving sermon on this text, Samuel Davies opened his exposition of this text with these words:

"The Lord Jesus possesses all those virtues in the highest perfection which render Him infinitely amiable, and qualify Him for the administration of a just, and gracious government over the world. The virtues of mortals when carried to a high degree very often run into those vices which have a kind of affinity to their very virtues."

Then he quotes a statement that apparently was in vogue in his day, "Right, too rigid, hardens into wrong." In other words, in mortals, a man committed to righteousness and committed in principle, unflinching in his commitment to right, can very easily cross the line into a harshness and into an inflexibility. "Strict justice steels itself into excessive severity and the man is lost in the judge." In other words, the tenderness that ought to mark humanity in the midst of suffering humanity is lost in this absorption with principle and with equity. But in Jesus Christ, goodness and mercy are joined to this inflexible commitment to righteousness.

These seemingly opposite virtues center and harmonize in the highest perfection without running into any extremes. Hence, He is once set before us in Scripture as the Lamb. Remember in John's vision? "I saw as it were a lamb, in the midst of the throne." Yet, in that same book, He is called the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Well, is He Lamb or is He Lion? When it is right for Him to be Lamb, He's all Lamb. As a lamb before his shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth. Pilate marveled. Herod marveled at His silence, before all of this sham witness, of His so-called sins. When it's time to be a Lamb, He's all Lamb. When it's time to be a Lion, He's all Lion. Psalm 50 shows Him as the Lion who says, I will rend you in pieces. Now I ask you, can you worship and admire a Jesus who is perfect Lamb and perfect Lion? Not all Lamb, not all Lion, but perfect Lamb, perfect Lion? In this passage, we see Him, the Servant of Jehovah, anointed by His Father to go forth to accomplish His mission; and He shall be, He must be, successful in that mission, but in that mission, He is not so preoccupied with the world-encompassing task laid

upon Him than when He passes by a bruised reed, He just nudges it, and sees it break. He stops, takes that bruised reed and He tenderly props it up, splints it, wraps some tape around it. That's the picture of our Lord, filled with zeal to accomplish His Messianic mission. Yes, so much so that at one point when He sets His face like a flint to go to Jerusalem, it says that even His disciples were amazed. There was an aura of determination, of fixation, that they could not comprehend. Yet, in the midst of that, He never walks by the bruised reed and carelessly snaps it off. When He sees the smoking flax, He doesn't say, 'Look, we've got to get on with it. We've got no time to stop and tend smoking flaxes. Let's snip them off, and pull it out and ignite it.' No, the smoking flax He will not quench. How we ought to admire and to worship our Blessed Savior for all the perfections, the holy humanity, seen in perfect balance in our Lord Jesus.

b) Secondly, Trust the Lord Jesus, to be just such a Savior to you.

We began by considering the beginning of the book of Matthew; "The Book of the Generations of Jesus Christ." The book closes with the words; "Lo, I am with *you* always, even to the consummation of the age" and –the Christ who is my Savior, my Lord, my Keeper, my Preserver, my Protector– I can trust Him to continue to be what He has declared in this text to be: the Lord's Servant who will never break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax.

When I know myself to be the bruised reed, when I, like John, find myself in a place where faith is low, and my whole world has come crashing down at my feet and I hardly know my left hand from my right, it is precisely then that the accuser will come and say, 'What will He have to do with you? You're nothing but a bruised reed. You're nothing but a piece of flax that stinks.' There's no pure or even discernible flame of faith and love and zeal and repentance. 'What use does He have for you?' That's what the accuser will say to you. 'What use are you?? Give up and die. Your life is done.' If there's a man, or woman, or boy, or girl of faith, you need to face your accuser, and say, 'My Savior is the One who has

committed never to break a bruised reed and never to quench a smoking flax.' You look up into His face and you say, 'Lord Jesus, this isn't a very glamorous thing You're looking at. It's a bruised reed that's drooping over, apparently useless, cast off, apparently no good for anything, but Lord, You said You would not break bruised reeds. And Lord, I'm smoking flax. If I had to look through the most powerful microscope, I wonder if I could even find a glimmer of any real living fire, of zeal for Your Honor, of tenderness, of brokenness? Lord, my repentance shames me. My faith is well nigh indiscernible. My zeal, I can't even think of it without shame. But Lord Jesus, You have said in Your Word, that You would not quench the smoking flax.'

In the world's view, that's not very good for self-esteem to say, 'I'm a bruised reed and a smoking flax.' If you're committed to this wretched gospel of self-esteem, you'll never, never be able to walk as a Christian in a Biblical way. It's not flattering to say, 'Lord, I'm a bruised reed. I have weakness and instability. My perspectives are far too narrow. I'm a smoking piece of flax at this point.' But you see, you're a reed and a piece of flax for whom the Son of God shed His Precious Blood, for whom He came all the way from heaven by way of Mary's womb to get up to a Cross where hell would be poured out upon His Holy soul. That's your value to Him. So you come, as the bruised reed and the smoking flax, and say, 'Lord Jesus, manifest in me Your Messianic function and identity. You are the Lord's Servant who will not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax. Lord Jesus, be my Support. Support this bruised reed. You say you won't break it. Lord I'm ready to break. Do your holy work. You say you add grace to the humble. Add grace now to me –grace to see me through, grace to get me out, grace to bring me all the way home. You resist the proud. Mend me up and send me on my way conscious of my weakness, looking to You, instead of myself, equipped and adjusted anew to deal with people like You dealt with me. Help me to bask in the knowledge of what I am to you. You love me more than I can imagine, yet in my shortsightedness, all I see and feel is my apparent uselessness. Mend me so I perceive correctly.'

In conclusion, the third point of application is not only to worship and admire such a Savior, but to trust Him to be such a Savior to you.

c) Imitate Him in your dealing with others.

The Scripture says in 1 John 2:6, "He that says he abides in Him ought himself so to walk even as He walked." Jesus said, "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another as I have loved you." Surely, this is one dimension of His love by which He nourishes and cherishes all of the bruised reeds and the smoking flaxes for whom He shed His Precious Blood.

You and I are called upon to imitate Him in our dealings one with another.<sup>1</sup> We are to deal with one another as the Lord Jesus deals with us, and we will see each other at times as bruised reeds, as smoking flaxes, and we need to deal with one another as the Lord Jesus deals with us. When someone has done something that was irresponsible and stupid and now they're reaping the fruits of that stupidity and irresponsibility or even sin, what is our function? Are we to rub their noses in it? Give them a lecture on consequences?? No, we are to be like our Savior and to come to the bruised reed, to the smoking flax and to minister in the gentleness of our Lord Jesus. Isn't that what Galatians 6 says? "If a man be overtaken in a trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness: considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."

When dealing with people who come and expose some aspect of a sordid declension from the Lord, what do I say? What do you want me to do? Spit on you? What do you want me to do? Throw you out? No!

Say, 'I'm a sinner and apart from the daily mercy of God given to me in Jesus Christ, where would I be? And (whatever you've done) but by the grace of God on the day you did it, I'd have done something ten times worse apart from the grace of God.' Surely, if we are present monuments of the fact that Jesus does not break bruised reeds or quench smoking flaxes, we ought in our dealings with one another to reflect the same position as our Lord Jesus.

ii) Application to those who are not the people of God.

a) A sincere question to those who are not in Christ.

For those of you who never divorced yourself from sin and are not married to Christ in the bond of faith; and you have not turned from running your own life or being in the God business; if you have not embraced the Living God as your God and His Son as your Savior and your Lord, why would you not want to put yourselves, in the hands of such a gracious Savior? Why would you not want to put yourself, unconditionally, in the hands of a Savior who says, 'If you do so, I'll pardon all of your sins? I'll break the chains that bind you. I will give you a title to eternal life and I will be to you the kind of Savior I was prophesied to be by Isaiah and that Matthew says I was manifesting Myself to be in My earthly ministry. I do not break bruised reeds, and I do not quench smoking flaxes.'

I ask you to think on this question: What reason can you give for not putting yourself in the hands of so gracious a Savior? Unbelief is moral madness. That's why when Jesus said, "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly of heart; and you shall find rest for your souls." Why would you not come and take a yoke that brings you rest? Your present master gives you no rest. He promises you pie in the sky and all he gives you is an accusing conscience. However sweet the momentary taste of sin may be, it results in a bitter aftertaste. It isn't worth it. Here is a Savior who is committed to so dealing with all of His people, that the bruised reeds among them He does not break and the smoking flaxes He does not quench. I ask you sincerely, why would you not want such a Savior to be yours?

b) A solemn warning to those who are not in Christ.

Yes, I've asked a sincere question, but I must close with a solemn warning. While He'll cherish, nurture, and preserve the weakest of those who truly trust Him, He will utterly crush all who oppose Him. Hear His own Words from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 21. This is where some people can't hack the Jesus of the Bible. They want a Jesus who's all Lamb and no Lion. Sadly,

there's some who would have Him all Lion and no Lamb, but let the Lord Jesus Himself tell us what He will be to some. Matthew 21:42-44:

*"Jesus said unto them, did you never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner; this was from the Lord, and it's marvelous in our eyes? Therefore, I say unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."*

Now this is Jesus speaking, the one who will never break a bruised reed, who will never quench a smoking flax. This is Jesus speaking. Listen to His Words . . .

*"He that falls on this stone" (Jesus said, 'I am that stone spoken of by the Psalmist. I am that stone.') "and whoever falls on that stone shall be broken to pieces; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust."*

He will grind him to powder! Here the same Servant of Jehovah, whom it is said, His gentle hands will never break a bruised reed. He said, I Am that stone rejected of the builders, but chosen and appointed by the Lord Jehovah. If He falls upon you, if He comes upon you in the fury of His righteous judgment, He will grind you to powder. Don't you mistake the gentleness of Jesus as effeminate to indulge your willful unbelief. "He that believeth not, shall be damned." The same Jesus, who will never break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax will grind to powder everyone who says, 'I'll take my chances, maintain my own independence, self-will, and pride.' Don't become an eternal example of what it means to be ground to powder by God's Chief Cornerstone. Perhaps some wonder why I don't indulge in telling jokes, and creating a climate of laid-back, relaxed, easy, low-key, cool, communication. Tell 5, 10, 15 funny, cute stories. I'll tell you why. I believe what Jesus said. The day is coming when people who heard of the love and mercy and compassion of Jesus and will say, 'No, no, no.' Harken, the day is coming when Christ will have the final "No," and He'll grind them to powder. May God have mercy on you, that today the Spirit of God will apply the Word to your conscience and cause you



to see. Why should you be a monument to His might and power to grind you to powder, when you could be a monument of His gentleness and tenderness –never breaking the bruised reed and never quenching the smoking flax?

I believe when we get to Heaven, the Lord Himself will show us all the times when we didn't even know we were bruised reeds, but He did. When we were so close to bending and breaking, but He secured us so that we would not be broken. We were the smoking flax and He nurtured the life that He implanted until at last He brings us home to the consummation of that life in His very presence. May God grant that the sight of our Savior will draw out the hearts of all of us who know Him, to admire Him, to worship Him, to trust Him, to be just such a Savior to us, and to pray that we may imitate Him in our dealings with one another. And for those of you who are not in Christ, may that question follow you to your home. Why would you refuse such a gracious Savior? And may the solemn warning fasten itself upon your conscience and give you no rest till you turn to Him.

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<sup>1</sup> We are to imitate Him when dealing with fellow Christians where we have no reason to doubt the profession of the believer with whom we are bound in common confession of faith and attachment to Christ, where there's not been a repudiation of that confession, and where there's not been official Church discipline which has labeled someone's profession as spurious, thus putting that person out of the Church.