

God's Chosen Servant (Mat. 12.15-21)

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Introduction

When you came in the door today, and sat down, you sat down at the communion table. We are here to focus our thoughts in a distinct way on the Lord Jesus. We are here at the table to honor Him as He said, "Do this in remembrance of me." Matthew helps us do this when in 12.15-21 he quotes from the book of Isaiah describing the coming Messiah. This text guides our remembering along the lines of God's reminding.

Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all ¹⁶ and ordered them not to make him known. ¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: ¹⁸ "Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. ¹⁹ He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; ²⁰ a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; ²¹ and in his name the Gentiles will hope."

Of course, this is not only a description; it is a promise regarding the central hope of the OT. Thus, the writer cites various details about the coming one, and all of them confirm the significant fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and the servant of Jehovah. Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's promise. He is God's chosen servant as verse eighteen states, and this is the title of the message for this communion service: God's servant, uniquely, "God's Chosen Servant."

In the flow of thought, the description of Jesus stands in marked contrast to the picture we have of the Pharisees and how they viewed the Lord Jesus. The transition in verse 15 indicates this much: **"But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him. Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all ¹⁶ and ordered them not to make him known. ¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah..." (14-16).**

What do we learn about our Lord from this text? We learn about His wisdom, His identity, and His love.

1A. The wisdom of Jesus-Messiah (Mat.12.15-17)

Jesus knew that the Pharisees were trying to find some way to destroy Him and being aware of it, he did three things. He withdrew from them (from there, from the area where these men lived, from the context where opposition to His actions fermented), He continued steadfast in His work ("many followed him, and he healed them all"), and He insisted on secrecy (he ordered those healed "not to make him known").

The insistence on secrecy is not something new. In an earlier account, we read that Jesus "sternly warned two blind He healed to keep what happened to themselves: **"See that no one knows about it"** (9.30). There we were struck by the fact that, notwithstanding His stern warning, **"they went away and spread his fame through all that district"** (9.31).

Matthew, as it were, pauses, and slows down the narrative, to point out the fact that Jesus did these things with the specific purpose of fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah (**This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, 12.17**). What Matthew means by "this" surely refers to what some call the "messianic secret in the Gospels." Of course, it has a context that fills out the idea of secrecy: despite serious opposition, Jesus continued His work in a way shaped by that opposition with a secrecy that paradoxically revealed His messianic calling. Withdrawing is not due to cowardice and it does not hinder His work. Jesus exercised wisdom in promoting the great goal He came to

accomplish. It was God's plan that, before He completed His redemptive work (and part of the process of completing it), He would have a teaching ministry of roughly three years to lay the foundation of the church He came to build.

Thus, Jesus gave us the gospel in a seed form that would sprout into a full-blown tree. He gave the good news in this way to His apostles and to us through them (the Gospel of Matthew is a case in point). In order to fulfill this teaching ministry in the time and process appointed, as Alexander puts it, He had to "check and regulate the progress of events, so as not to precipitate the consummation, but secure and complete the requisite preparatory process" (Matthew, 330). Accordingly, Jesus withdrew from the cities where the influence of the opposition was the greatest and where He would be opposing them "in their faces" and within their immediate grasp. He went to the sea and still multitudes of people followed Him there (Mk 3.7), and "he healed them all" (in this way giving marvelous definition of the gospel of the kingdom).

Throughout His ministry, Jesus exercised a great deal of discretion in order to fulfill His calling as God's chosen servant. Eventually, fulfilling His calling meant that "he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things...and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Mat 16.21), but that is after He lays the foundation of the church (cf. Mat 16.18, **I will build my church**). For the time being, He displays great wisdom in the way He gave us the gospel in both His words and His actions as He cut a straight path in, out, through, and around hostility.

2A. The Identity of God's Chosen Servant

"Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles (12.18).

Just as we get a glimpse of the wisdom of Christ in His ministry from the NT account of fulfillment, likewise we get a glimpse of His identity from the OT promise of His coming.

The ancient prophecy begins with the word "Behold." The prophet says, "Look at Him, and fix your eyes on Him." What do we see? This is a very direct reminder from God about Jesus; it is a reminder that explains who He is and interprets His work on earth in terms of the OT promises that He fulfills (He is my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved, and I am pleased with Him from the depths of my being). Similarly, God the Father spoke at the baptism of Christ saying: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Mat 3.17). God is pleased with His elect servant Son who owned our sins at His baptism and set His head like a flint to bear the punishment of our sins. He received the water of John's baptism in repentance confessing His sins as God's servant, which means owning our sins as His own. Serving God means that He serves us in this unspeakable way!

It is amazing that the one who is beloved, chosen, set apart, preeminent, and Spirit empowered is *all of that for serving*; He is God's elect servant appointed to proclaim good news to the Gentiles. Thus, through Isaiah, God says, "He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth and the coastlands wait for his law...I have called you...I will give you as a covenant for the people...a light for the nations to open the eyes of the blind" (42.4.6-7). From the promises to Israel in the book of Isaiah, Matthew confirms the serving mission of Christ to the Gentiles. He is the Messiah and He works on behalf of the Gentiles. What He does is proclamation; He proclaims justice. We have talked about how Jesus makes proclamation in word and deed. He proclaims justice, remarkably, by His works of healing. These works embody the gospel of God's justice. They put the sound of redemptive restoration loudly in our ears. They put the teaching of good news beautifully before our eyes: Behold, the one to whom the Father speaks, look and listen, He is loved, He pleases the Father, the Father gives Him the Holy Spirit without measure, and on that basis and ground, He proclaims saving justice to the nations.

3A. The Love of God's Chosen Servant

He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; ²⁰ a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; ²¹ and in his name the Gentiles will hope" (Mat 12.19-21).

His love comes to expression both negatively (v. 19) and positively (v. 20).

1B. Two things show what His love is by what it is not

1C. He is not quarrelsome (12.19)

Unquestionably, Jesus was at odds with established religion in Israel. He pulled back on no punches in arguing with them. He even used the powerful *a fortiori* argument form against them and in defense of His conduct on the Sabbath (cf. how much more valuable is a man than a sheep, Mat 12.12). In response to the sinful hearts and cruel actions of the Pharisees, Jesus gave strong rebuke but He was never combative or quarrelsome. He did not argue for argument sake to elevate Himself by tearing others down. A quality in the love of God's chosen servant was His ability to argue without malice, and yet tenaciously. He is a wonderful example to follow.

2C. He is not self-seeking

He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets (v. 19).

Obviously, people heard His voice in the streets in a literal sense, but He did not cry aloud and raise His voice for notice; He did not seek notoriety for notoriety sake. As we have seen, He continually restrained people who were healed from spreading the word about Him. Word still spread and people came from all over the place for healing, but He did not publish His miracles as fully as they might have been without His restraining word and conduct. He knew that He was on the road to glory, but the road there was steep and difficult to climb, and the timing of His arrival was not His to choose. The Father chose and appointed Him for servant-hood under authority. As God's chosen servant, He is not self-seeking and must suffer while He waits for the Father's appointment to glory (again, a marvelous example to follow).

2B. On the positive side, His love is kind, gracious, and conquering

1C. Kindness

A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench (v. 20)

Whatever else these images may convey, one thing is for sure; they point us to the kindness of God's chosen servant. Both the bruised reed and the smoldering wick indicate weakness. A reed is not strong to begin with but when bruised, it is ready to collapse. Jesus does not break the bruised reed nor does He quench a smoldering wick. A wick that has such a weak flame is on the verge of going out. He does not break us or smother us. His loving-kindness fills out the picture of not being quarrelsome. Interestingly, when Paul describes the servant of the Lord, He must have Christ in mind as our pattern: the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness (2 Tim 2.24-25). Just consider how Jesus did all of these things in His conflict with the Pharisees and in His love for the crowds (cf. 9.36, **When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were helpless, like sheep without a shepherd**). His kindness is loving-kindness.

2C. Grace

In view in both images is the weakness of man, especially his weakness and frailty in the fall. As God's servant, Jesus proclaims justice and that should mean our judgment; He could righteously break us and smother us in our sins. Instead, He loves and treats us kindly. This shows His grace to broken sinners in need. It extends over the life of the Christian.

3C. Victory

In His place as a special servant of God, Jesus will continue to proclaim justice to the Gentiles in His words and deeds and through His apostles to the end of the age (Mat 10.18, 23). He will make this proclamation with kindness and grace to frail sinners efficaciously, until he brings justice to victory. Jesus is a conquering servant and in this way, Matthew has brought us to the center of the center of the grace of God in the gospel.

Conclusion

Therefore, we have hope in His name (12.21). That is, our hope rests firmly in who He is. Because He is God's beloved Son and chosen servant to whom He gave the Spirit, then His love is saving; His proclamation leads the way to final victory. In turn, this is why we as Gentiles from outside the covenant family of Israel have hope as expectation and anticipation. Our expectation of a great future before us depends on our focus on Jesus-Messiah, and knowing Him in a personal and intimate way as our Sabbath king gives us a foretaste now of what is yet to be.

To Him be all glory both now and forevermore. Amen

What then do we now say?

In the very partaking of the elements, we give a word of response to God's word to us.

1) I need Him

I need God's chosen servant. Because of my sins, I need the suffering servant who pleased the Father always in complete obedience. His obedience to the Father is my salvation. He was the beloved Son who did all that the Father demanded of Him to save sinners.

O Lord Jesus, I cling to you as my priest, as my ladder extending from the earth to heaven.

2) I own Him as my very own

We appropriate the bread and wine; this means that we each say, more than "He is a great servant of God," but "He is my prophet, priest, and king."

O Lord Jesus, I submit myself to you as my prophet, priest, and king. I commit to obedient serving, to learning of you and following you in obedience.

3) I own His brothers and sisters as my brothers and sisters

By taking of this single loaf, which represents Christ and our union with Him, I acknowledge my union with those sitting here in this room. A question that has to follow me is what can I do to promote one-anothering love? We have to see each other as works in progress; the one doing the work is God's chosen servant what He began, that He will complete. On one level, if we look around, we have to humble ourselves and acknowledge that we fail to love one another, as we ought.

Thus, we say, O Lord Jesus, I commit myself to fight with self-centeredness and to find ways to reach out to your brothers and sisters here in this church and across the earth.