

Gentle Power – Matthew 12:15-21

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Resemblance

1. I've noticed something interesting: People and their pets often look alike.
2. So much time, spent in such close relationship with each other, it's inevitable, I guess, that they would start looking similar.
3. Where this is even more obvious is in marriage between a husband and wife.
4. After 30, 40, or 50 years of living together, they really do seem to take on similar features & appearance.
5. This is something we ought to expect – because the main Bible text which defines marriage says that the two shall become one – *what? One-flesh.*
6. But there's a form of growing similarity between a husband and wife which is even more obvious than their *physical* appearance; it's in the realm of their *personalities*.
 - a. their close relationship leads to a oneness that profoundly affects the way they look at & react to life.
 - b. the way they speak, their sense of purpose have all been altered by their many years of mutual sharing.
7. And as God intends marriage, they move from who & what they were before they married toward some middle ground in which each of them becomes more *like* the other.

B. Marriage The Model

1. This is why the Bible repeatedly uses *marriage* as the picture of the kind of relationship God wants with His people.
2. Marriage is the most *intimate* relationship we can enjoy – so it serves as the perfect picture for us to understand the kind of arrangement God wants with us.
3. He wants no lap-dog, just some compliant pet. He wants a *bride*, a companion who bears His image and can relate to Him in as close a way as the Creator and the created can.
4. And in this relationship, this covenant, a *oneness* is forged;
 - a. only in this case, we don't move *toward one another*.
 - b. no, in our relationship with God, *we* do all the movement, because He's perfect and cannot change. Indeed - we don't *want* Him to change!
 - c. rather, we want to be *like Him*; we want to become like He is, for He is perfect.
5. This is what discipleship is all about – it's the process of growing in our relationship with Jesus so that we become more & more *like* Him.
 - a. a disciple isn't merely a student, a disciple is a *follower*.
 - b. to those Jesus invited to be His disciples he said – “Follow me.”
 - c. what He meant was, “Be *with* Me. Hang out with Me. Where I am, *you be too*.”
6. Being a Christian isn't about memorizing certain doctrinal formulas and practicing a religious ritual in a special location.

7. Being a Christian is nothing more nor less than a vital connection to the Person of Jesus Christ.
8. And as this relationship grows over time & experience, we become more like Him.
 - a. our character is changed, our personality is affected.
 - b. and our behavior, actions, speech, & choices look more & more like Jesus.
 - c. the word 'Christian' means 'like-Christ'.

C. This Sounds Similar

1. In the passage we're looking at today, Matthew returns to the radically different way Jesus used power.
2. Just two weeks ago in our study in ch. 9, we took a look at this.
3. The reason we're going to take a look at it again today is because we ought to major on the things God majors on – and this is definitely a major lesson of scripture: that the way God uses power and the way man uses it are very different.
4. If we would be what we are – *Christians*, people who are becoming more and more like Jesus - then we need to have our minds renewed on this important subject of the use of power.

II. TEXT

A. V. 15

15 But when Jesus knew *it*, He withdrew from there. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all.

1. At this point in the story, the opposition toward Jesus on the part of the religious leaders is mounting.
2. He knew their resistance was inevitable, so not long after it began, He made it clear to His chief antagonists, the Pharisees and scribes, that He wasn't interested in currying their favor or getting on their good side.
3. On the contrary, Jesus knew their stiff legalism was a sad misrepresentation of God and had burdened the common people with unnecessary barriers in coming to Him.
4. So Jesus set about to *challenge* the Pharisees' silly traditions & rules.
5. Mostly, He did this by defying their interpretations on how to observe the Sabbath.
 - a. He did such terrible & forbidden things as healing the sick and plucking some heads of wheat on the Sabbath.
 - b. the Pharisees considered all of this work and laid into Him.
 - c. Jesus replied by showing them that their *man-made traditions* about how to obey the Sabbath law had actually ended up *violating* the law!
 - d. this infuriated them and they determined they had to do away with Him.
 - e. so v. 14 tells us they began laying plans on how they could destroy Him.
8. And that's why in v. 15 we read Jesus withdrew from the populated areas of Galilee where He'd spent the first year of His public ministry and where everyone was talking about Him.

9. He knew that those who were plotting against Him would cool down if the hubbub that constantly surrounded Him died down.
 - a. Mark tells us that He left that region and went northeast toward Tyre & Sidon in what today we know as Lebanon.
 - b. this was an area in which both Jews and Gentiles lived side by side.
10. Though Jesus had left the area of Capernaum to let things cool down with the Pharisees, a multitude of common folk still followed Him.
 - a. they followed Him because they had needs.
 - b. and Matthew tells us no matter what need they had, Jesus met it; He healed them **ALL!**
 - c. not one who was needy went away without having their need met.
11. What was true then is true today for Jesus has not changed.
 - a. no matter what your need is, the solution is Jesus.
 - b. maybe you've tried to find the solution to your problem or the answer to your need in a dozen other places, but every one of them has failed you.
 - c. Jesus will not fail you – He *can't* fail you!

B. Vs. 16-21

- 16 Yet He warned them not to make Him known, ¹⁷ that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: ¹⁸ “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 will declare justice to the Gentiles. ¹⁹ He will not quarrel nor cry out, Nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. ²⁰ A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench, Till He sends forth justice to victory; ²¹ And in His name Gentiles will trust.”**
1. Matthew sees in the way Jesus handled all of this, a fulfillment of Isaiah 42:1-4, which he quotes here.
 2. In v. 16 he says that Jesus warned the people He'd healed, *not* to make Him known.
 - a. why would He do that? Why wouldn't He *want* the free publicity?
 - b. you know what they say in Hollywood, “No news is *bad* news.”
 - c. for those seeking attention & notoriety, any coverage, any publicity is better than being ignored!
 3. The key to understanding why Jesus hushed the multitude of the healed lies in what He told them **NOT** to do – He told them not to **MAKE HIM KNOWN**.
 4. You see, the common folk had come to the point of believing Jesus was their long hoped for Messiah!
 - a. and with every day that passed and every new miracle He worked, they were getting more and more ready to start a popular movement that would bring Him to the throne of Israel.
 - b. Jesus was indeed their Messiah, but He told them to cease their talking about it.
 - c. He did so because while He was busy with showing them Who the Messiah was and what He was like,

- d. they were missing it in their wild expectations about what He *would* do when He finally declared Himself!
5. It was the popular belief that when the Messiah came, He would come in great glory, taking flaming vengeance on their enemies and making Israel the pre-eminent nation on Earth.
6. Over the preceding few decades before Jesus came, several *would-be* messiahs had come claiming to be Israel's Hope.
 - a. they'd always managed to rally support and attacked the Romans or whoever was currently on the throne.
 - b. but every one of these frauds had been shown to be counterfeit,
 - c. unfortunately, only after much bloodshed, heartache, and loss of human life and even more of the people's freedoms.
7. While there were always a handful of willing zealots who were anxious to battle the Romans and were just itching for someone to lead them, the vast bulk of the Jews of Jesus' day were now *reluctant* to accept anyone's claim to be the Messiah.
 - a. once bitten -- twice shy, they say.
 - b. well, the Jews had been bitten several times by pseudo-messiahs and the common people were not likely to go running off after just anyone.
 - c. this is why the movement around Jesus was so different and so worrisome to the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin, the Jewish national Ruling Council.
 - d. Jesus was making no open claim to being the Messiah, it was the people *themselves* who were making all the noise; and the noise was getting louder every week.
 - e. the reason the people were getting all worked up was because of the incredible things Jesus said & did.
 - f. the pseudo-messiahs had just been fiery political agitators; but they'd done no miracles, they'd healed no one, and they hadn't said anything as profound as Jesus had.
 - g. Jesus was different – every time He opened His mouth, it was like opening a treasure chest of spiritual wealth!
 - h. and miracles seemed to flow from Him like water from a spring!
8. So the people drew the conclusion Jesus was the Messiah!
 - a. but drawing that conclusion, they then set Him in their own goofy ideas about how the Messiah *ought* to come and what He *ought* to do.
 - b. the teaching Jesus gave was marvelous! The miracles and healings were cool.
 - c. but now they were getting to the point of saying, "Jesus, we've heard Your teaching already, and we're all healed – so let's get on with the *rest* of the program!
 - d. take up Your sword, and let's kick some Gentile behinds!
 - e. let's rid the holy land of the foreign scourge!"
9. As the popular movement to carry Him to the throne of Israel began to grow, He immediately put the brakes to it and told them to be silent!
10. He would not be turned into *their idea* of the Messiah, a popular revolutionary Hero.
11. The divine schedule must be kept. His revolution would come, not by the

shedding of *Roman* blood, it would come by the shedding of His own blood on a Roman cross. ^[1]

C. Fulfillment

1. Matthew sees in Jesus' resistance to the popular movement around Him a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah.
2. The prophet foresaw the Messiah as a *gentle* Conqueror. ^[2]
3. Keeping the popular idea of the Messiah in mind, take a look at how *Isaiah* said He would come –

18 “Behold!

- a. take a close look and understand.
- b. this word is found often in scripture, and always marks something God wants His people to take careful attention to.

My Servant whom I have chosen,

- c. this is clearly a prophecy of the Messiah, but notice the first word given to identify Him.
- d. He's a Servant; His role, His task, His mission is to *serve* – not **BE SERVED**, but to serve!
- e. for this service He is *chosen*, selected, appointed, sent.
- f. the Messiah is a king; in fact, He is King of all the creation.
- g. but when God the Father selects a *title* to assign the Messiah and then calls us to pay attention to Him, He calls Him a *servant*!
- h. can you see how contrary to the Jewish ideas of the Messiah this was?

My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased!

- i. this makes it clear that the servant just referred to is none other than the Messiah, for there is only one who pleases the Father completely and without flaw.
- j. God made it crystal clear to the nation of Israel that Jesus was their Messiah at His baptism in the Jordan by John the Baptist.
 - 1) when Jesus came up out of the water, the Spirit of God descended upon Him and a voice was heard from heaven saying, “Behold, this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”
 - 2) that was a repeat of the words of the prophet Isaiah, and something *everyone* knew was prophetic of the Messiah.

I will put My Spirit upon Him,

- k. when the Messiah came, He would not operate out of His own initiative or power, but out of the anointing of the Holy Spirit;
- l. in fact, that's really what the word Messiah (Christ) means – *anointed one*.

And He will declare justice to the Gentiles.

- m. the word ‘declare’ means to announce, to bring out to & share with
 - 1) when Messiah came, He wouldn't just declare justice *to* the Gentiles
 - 2) He would *share it with them*, bringing them *into* it.
- n. “now wait a minute,” the Jews would say, “I thought when Messiah came He would take justice to the Gentiles in the sense of taking it *to* them!”
- o. they didn't want Gentiles reaping the benefits of justice; they wanted them

to feel the *sharp edge* of it.

- p. Isaiah said that the Messiah would bring the *blessings* of justice to the world!

19 He will not quarrel nor cry out, Nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets.

- q. the Messiah would not argue or get caught up in angry debates with His opponents.
1) it's interesting reading the gospels and realizing that He never did.
2) He shows such marvelous restraint, even when standing before petty & ambitious little men who are working furiously at trying to get Him to lose His composure!
- r. Isaiah said He would not be a political rabble-rouser, stirring up the populace.
- s. one commentators says –
This King who is God's 'servant' will not reach His rightful place of eminence by any of the usual means of carnal force or political demagoguery; nor yet by means of the supernatural forces at His command. [3] [McClain]

20 A bruised reed He will not break,

- t. the reeds that grow along the sides of the rivers & streams grow tall, but they can also be fragile.
1) it was not uncommon for a strong wind or someone who passed through them to snap them in half.
2) the only way to repair the bent reed was by straightening it, then tying braces to it.

And smoking flax He will not quench,

- u. the smoking flax is the wick whose flame has died out for lack of oil and it is nothing now but a smoldering ember about to go out.
v. the easiest thing would be to just let it die or to help it along by snuffing it out.
4. In both these examples of *gentleness* Isaiah gives in v. 20, he employs a Hebrew figure of speech that's lost in the translation.
a. while they are both set as negations – “He will not break / He will not quench” they actually convey their opposite –
b. the bent reed, He will carefully straighten and mend.
c. the smoking flax He will renew with oil and then gently blow upon it to fan its nearly dead ember back to full flame.
5. There could be no greater picture of the salvation the Messiah would bring.
a. the salvation Jesus brought us wasn't *just* deliverance from the legal guilt of sin. It was that, and more!
b. Jesus came, as 1 John says, to *destroy* the works of the devil!
1) to undo, untie, unravel his evil plans
2) Jesus came to not only forgive, but to restore and set right.
3) He came to heal the wounds, and encourage the discouraged.
c. the Hebrew word 'salvation' means to be made whole & embraces *every*

- dimension* of our lives; body, soul, and spirit.
5. This is what the people of His day needed to understand.
 - a. they were looking for a General, a King who would come in political and military might and **force** all the bad guys into submission.
 - b. they **wanted** someone who would throw His weight around and make some dramatic changes!
 - c. Isaiah painted a very different picture of the Messiah –
 - 1) He would be **gentle** – concerned for those who’d been bent and broken by the power hungry forces of this world,
 - 2) those who’d been beat up by a world of selfishness & ambition.
 - 3) to these He would come alongside & tenderly lift them, applying the balm of His love.
 - 4) to those teetering on the edge of extinction, whose flame was about to go out through discouragement and despair,
 - 5) He would come and pour the oil of joy into and ever so gently bring them back to life as God intended it to be lived.
 6. And all of this Jesus was doing right then in their very midst while they were getting themselves all worked into a frenzy about pressing Him into the role **they** had assigned Him!
 7. Isaiah’s prophecy ends with -
- Till He sends forth justice to victory; ²¹ And in His name Gentiles will trust.”**
8. The word “till” is crucial!
 - a. Matthew wants his readers to understand that Jesus’ MO, His way of operating is through tender gentleness that regards the lowly, despised, rejected, and overlooked.
 - b. He possesses great power, **all power**, but that power is harnessed to the task of **servicing** the Father by **tenderly saving the lost** -
 - 1) by straightening what’s bent & healing what’s broken,
 - 2) by looking for those who are downcast & discouraged & coming alongside them to lift them up & make them secure.
 - c. and Jesus will **stay** in this mode of service – **TILL** justice has finally been put forth to victory over all sin & evil.
 9. While the Jews thought the Messiah was their **exclusive** King, Matthew reminds his readers that Isaiah said He would also be the King for the Gentiles!

III. CONCLUSION

A. His Method Has Not Changed

1. This lesson is needed in the Body of Christ today because some elements of the Church have become militant & angry.
2. Like the Jews of old, they’ve cast Jesus in the role of an angry Messiah Who’s sort of chomping at the bit in heaven asking the Father if He can come back **now** to kick some sinner-behinds.
3. They see things in an **us & them** kind of light.
 - a. “Jesus is on **our** side and is **against** you guys!” they say.

- b. Christian political organizations have formed that attempt to use political force to accomplish the aims of the Kingdom of God.
 - c. groups advocating some form of social change gather & issue hostile statements that only alienate.
 - d. in our resistance to certain sins, Christians often come off sounding angry & hateful.
4. And then, there's a whole group of denominations that actually believe it's through **force** that the whole world will be converted to Christ, and once we've done that, then Jesus will return.
 5. No! As Matthew and Isaiah made clear, Jesus' means and method will not change right up to the very end when He comes to wrap up history and bring in the day of the Final Redemption.
 6. He is **still** gentle, **still** tender and careful. His heart is **still** to gently come alongside those beaten up & bruised by sin & tenderly heal & restore them.
 7. He's **still** looking for the faintest glimmer of hope, of light & faith & no matter how small it is, He carefully tends it into a roaring blaze of righteousness & love.
 8. Yet how often we, who are supposed to look & act **like** Him, look, not for the spark in a smoldering wick, but for the tiniest whiff of smoke in an otherwise roaring flame!
 - a. while Jesus sees the potential for a diamond in a lump of coal, all we see nothing but a dirty piece of carbon.
 - b. while He sees a potential masterpiece in a palette of paints, all we see is a mess.
 - c. instead of joyously looking for what is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, and for **anything** praiseworthy, as Paul calls us to in Phil. 4, we're experts at finding the flaw, no matter how small it is.
 9. We must pray that the Lord would change our ideas about how to go about the task of winning the lost.
 10. We must pray that the Lord would give us eyes to see them as bent reeds and smoldering wicks,
 - a. and give us hearts not to angrily rebuke them for being bent and without light,
 - b. and certainly not of such a mind as to snap them off and snuff them out –
 - c. but to know the anointing of His Spirit to gently **serve** them and lovingly restore them **from** the penalty and effects of sin to the life Jesus came to give them.
 11. The Father has sent the very same Spirit Who imbued Jesus with this gentle power to us.
 12. May that power make us more like Him so we can carry on in His name till He comes.

B. To Those Who've Felt Beat Up By Christians

[1] MacDonald, W., & Farstad, A. (1997, c1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary* :

Old and New Testaments (Mt 12:15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

[2] *ibid*

[3] MacDonald, W., & Farstad, A. (1997, c1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments* (Mt 12:19). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.