

A Chosen Servant, Proclaiming Justice

Thomas Robinson, *Following or Rejecting Jesus*, 5, October 27, 2013

Matthew 12:9-21 [Cf. Mark 3:1-8; Luke 6:6-19]

⁹ He went on from there and **entered** their **synagogue**. ¹⁰ And a man was there with a **withered hand**. And they asked him, “**Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?**” – so that they might accuse him.

¹¹ He said to them, “Which one of you who has one **sheep**, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? ¹² Of how much more value is a **human** than a sheep! **So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.**”

¹³ Then he said to the man, “**Stretch out your hand.**” And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other.

¹⁴ But the **Pharisees** went out and conspired against him, **how to destroy him**.

¹⁵ **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.**” [Isaiah 42:1-4]*

Matthew 12:7

⁷ “And if you had known what this means, *‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’* [Hosea 6:6] you would not have condemned the guiltless. ⁸ For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.”

Matthew 3:16-17 (Cf. 17:5)

¹⁶ And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, “**This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.**”

Isaiah 42:1-4

¹ Behold **my servant**, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom **my soul delights**;
I have **put my Spirit upon him**;
he will bring forth **justice to the nations**.

² He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice,
or make it heard in the street;

³ a **bruised reed** he will not break,
and a **faintly burning wick** he will not quench;
he will **faithfully bring forth justice**.

⁴ He will not grow faint or be discouraged
till he **has established justice in the earth**;
and the coastlands wait for his law.

Jeremiah 4:22

²² “For my people are foolish; they know me not; they are thoughtless children; they have no understanding. They are ‘wise’ – in doing evil! But how to do good they know not.”

Mark 7:37

³⁷ And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

Controversy becomes Dangerous Conflict

Jesus lived and taught a vision of God's kingdom that seemed to many religious teachers in Israel to contradict God's rule, which surely must mean rigorous obedience to God's law. His welcome to 'tax collectors and sinners' spoke volumes – even to John the Baptist [Mt 11:2].

Mt 11-12 reflects the crescendo of questions and lets us see the distinct character of Jesus' vision flowing out of a deep interaction with scripture. He answers John with Isa 61:1-2.

He thinks of God's varied ways of revelation in John and himself – and fickle responses to both. He asserts that God is bypassing the "wise" and going to "little children." He says that only his Father recognizes the Son, and he calls the burdened to his yoke to find rest.

Like John, Jesus was in danger from Herod. But the conflict over the direction of God's people flared with the Pharisees, who had no power like chief priests, Herod or Rome, but influence. They urged rigorous zeal for the law, supported resistance to Rome, built a pure community.

Doing Good – God's Mercy makes the Sabbath Holy

Sabbath became a focus. As scribes, the Pharisees claimed the right to prescribe in oral tradition 39 forms of work forbidden on Sabbath. Holiness was the sacrifice of work. Jesus disagreed both with oral law and their authority. As 'anointed' – like David or priests – he claimed that the holiness of the Sabbath was in doing God's desire. What God desired was '*hesed*'/mercy. The Sabbath was for resting from our own will to fulfill God's desire.

In the synagogue, the Pharisees set a direct challenge. Jesus responded with an argument even 'children' and the burdened could understand: a sheep in a pit Then with his own challenge: "It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." Acting out God's *hesed* is keeping the day holy.

He heals the man. But the miracle does not lead to faith in his opponents. Harsher conflict.

Withdrawing – Staying Focused on the Bruised Reed

Jesus might well have been advised to fight his opponents' fire with fire. Use his growing influence to undermine the Pharisees, take over their synagogues, etc. Instead, Jesus withdraws. He stays focused on living out the sign of healing rather than conflict as pointing to God's kingdom. People find and follow him because they receive life.

But because the potential for violent opposition to him was growing – Herod, Pharisees, priests – he urges those he heals not "make him known." Mt shows that this is part of Jesus' intentional purpose of filling up the prophetic vision of the Lord's servant seen especially in Isaiah. He avoids public quarreling. He doesn't focus on the zealous fighter against the foreigner but on the 'bruised reed' and 'smoldering wick,' to renew their life with hope.

The Servant of the Lord and the Hope of the World

Matthew here includes his longest scripture quote: Isa 42:1-4. This text is often called the first of four "Servant Songs" in Isaiah (40-55). The best known is the last, longest [Isa 52:13-53:12] centering on the Lord's "Suffering Servant," already briefly quoted by Mt in 8:17. These songs are challenging because they combine the roles of Israel as God's Servant people [Isa 41:8-10] with the description of God's Servant as an individual who helps both Israel and the world.

Through Jesus' life it became clear that he combined both the role of Israel's 'Anointed' king (Messiah) who embodies the whole people, with the powerful role of the Servant, who serves/heals/suffers for Israel and all the nations (Gentiles), as Israel was to be a light to the nations. Through him humanity's great alienation from God in sin and death is ended.

He is the beloved, living by God's Spirit, bringing God's will and justice to its true victory. He brings all nations into the story of Abraham, Moses, David, to give hope to all the world.