

Bruised Reeds and Smoldering Wicks - Matthew 12:14-21

Introduction: Jesus used many ways to teach. He would tell stories, use parables, and also use illustrations from nature to get a particular spiritual truth across. For example, He said: *“You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Look at the birds of the air that they do not sow or reap. Consider the lilies of the field how they neither toil nor spin.”* (Matthew 5).

This morning we’re going to look at Jesus’ servant heart. If there is one verse in our text that illustrated best how Jesus Christ would minister and serve in the lives of people, it is verse 20. In this verse, Jesus uses another example from nature to illustrate how he cares for people.

He said, *“A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory.”* (NIV) *“He will not crush those who are weak or quench the smallest hope until he brings full justice with his final victory.”* (NLT)

What are bruised reeds and smoldering wicks? And how does Jesus respond to them? Those are the questions we will try to answer this morning.

1. The Bruised Reed

A reed was a tall hollow blade of grass which grew by the river bank. It was a very familiar sight along the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee. But sometimes, a strong wind would blow, or fishermen would trample them down and they would become bowed and bent over.

And in this verse, Jesus compares the battered and shattered lives of people as Bruised Reeds. There are a lot of Bruised Reeds out there. People who once stood strong and confident can become battered and bruised by many things: Someone speaks a harsh word against you. A friend stabs you in the back. A spouse leaves you. An illness strikes. Someone disappoints you. A close friend or family member tragically dies. You lose your job. Lots of things can come along and leave us bruised and beaten up.

Jesus had all kind of encounters with Bruised Reeds.

Just in this chapter alone we’ve seen His own disciples (1-2) who were being accused of breaking the Sabbath.

We’ve seen a man with the deformed hand (9-10) who was at the synagogue on the Sabbath looking for a hand out. But the Pharisees had no compassion on the man.

We even see the crowd full of sick folks who followed Jesus in vs. 15 and then in vs. 22 we'll see the blind and mute man possessed by demons.

I can think of other encounters Jesus had with bruised reeds: There was Zacchaeus who climbed up a sycamore tree to try to see Jesus. He was bruised by his own deceitfulness and by the crowds who shunned him

I think of the woman caught in the act of adultery who was bruised by an immoral lifestyle and an unforgiving religion that wanted to stone her to death.

I think of Mary and Martha who were bruised after the death of their brother Lazarus. Even Jesus had disappointed them!

But when Jesus encountered these bruised reeds, instead of brushing them aside, He reached out to them with compassion and love and mercy.

The Pharisees laid down the law to Jesus' disciples over the proper behavior on the Sabbath. But Jesus didn't join the parade. He didn't turn to His disciples and say, "*Now guys, you know better than that. I've told you a thousand times to straighten up.*" No, He didn't rebuke His disciples, instead He showed the Pharisees that He was the Lord of the Sabbath.

To the man with the deformed hand, He was probably there to beg for a handout, but Jesus didn't just give the man some change and send him on his way. No, He gave him something better. He told him to stretch out his hand and it was healed.

According to vs. 15, all those in that crowd that day who were sick, Jesus healed them.

To the blind and mute demon possessed man in vs. 22; He restored the man so he could see and speak.

For Zacchaeus, Jesus had lunch with him and brought salvation to his home.

For the adulterous woman, Jesus didn't cast the first stone, although He could have. He was without sin. But instead, He offered forgiveness and told her to "*go and sin no more.*"

And as for Mary and Martha. Jesus not only felt their sorrow by weeping with them, He brought Lazarus back from the grave!

Well folks, Jesus hasn't changed! The world may want to cast the bruised reeds aside. The world may not see your pain, but Jesus does! And Jesus still says to all who the bruised reeds out there, "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*" (Matthew 11:28)

He still says, "*If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.*" (John 7:37)

Now don't get the idea that He's some sort of all year Santa Claus though. Even though you may be a bruised reed, you can only receive from Him when you come to Him with a humble heart. You must be willing to repent, and have the faith to express your need.

Psalm 51:17 says, "*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*"

If you're a bruised reed today, Jesus will reach out to you with mercy and compassion if you'll come to Him in humble faith and repentance. Next, let's look at:

2. The Smoldering Wick

For those in the first century the image of a smoldering wick was an oil lamp, not a candle. But for the sake of familiarity, we'll use the modern day candle as an illustration. You've seen a birthday candles that are burning brightly over the birthday cake. For some, it can get so bright and hot you have to have the fire department standing by. But imagine you're there for this festive occasion. You're celebrating another year of life, and the birthday cake with all the lit candles is there to symbolize the joy and happiness of it all.

But now imagine those candles blown out and all you have left are the faintly glowing wicks and the trails of smoke. That which was once was alive and on fire, now is cold and uninviting. No wonder those candles are removed as quickly as possible. Nobody wants the smoldering candles around anymore because they've served their purpose and are now useless, right?

Smoldering Wicks are a lot like bruised reeds, except that they are more desperate. Smoldering wicks are useless. Smoldering wicks are hopeless. Smoldering wicks just need to be put out of their misery and discarded.

Sometimes we can become like those smoldering wicks. Our faith once burned brightly. We were alive and full of joy. We were very useful too because the fire that burned within us served to warm others as well.

But now, for some reason, our faith and our hope are almost gone and the wick is just smoldering. And we wonder, *“Is there hope for me? Can I ever hope again?”*

What can put our fire out? Well, sometimes the fire is put out because of winds of adversity. Sometimes the flame can be doused because of some outward stress or strife. But sometimes we can douse our own flame by not feeding the fire - when we fail to stay close to the Lord - when we lay down our Bibles – when our prayer life suffers – when our church attendance slackens. That is when the fire begins to go out and all that is left is a smoldering wick. A fire that is not fed will die out.

Let me give you two examples from Luke 8:40-56 of a smoldering wick. The first is named Jairus who was a ruler of the synagogue. His daughter was dying, but he believed Jesus could heal her. He went to Jesus to ask for His help. But while he was on his way, he got word that it was too late; his little girl had died. *“It’s no use now,”* the messengers told him. *“You might as well go home and prepare for a funeral.”* And the fire went out and all that was left for Jarius was a smoldering wick.

But the Bible says that when Jesus heard what happened, he said to Jarius, *“Don’t be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed”* (50). And immediately, the smoldering wick was relit. Jesus restored his faith. Jesus gave him back his daughter.

The other is an unnamed woman with a blood disorder who had spent all her money on doctors. For 12 years she had seen one doctor after another and she was any better. And to make matters worse, according to Jewish law, her bleeding made her unclean. She couldn’t even go to the temple to worship. Her faith was slowly dying. Everything is going wrong. She might as well give up hope. She was a smoldering wick if there ever was one.

But in one last ditch effort to feed the fire of faith, she desperately reached out to Jesus in faith. And Jesus responded with healing power. She was restored and her smoldering wick was relit.

There is a lesson in these two examples for all the smoldering wicks out there. Be careful to feed the fire of faith or you’ll become an extinguished wick.

When the conviction of the Holy Spirit comes upon you, He’s not there to beat you down! He is there to lift you up. He’s not there to douse your flame, but to rekindle your flame.

And don't fool yourself in to believing that if you're not where you should be in your relationship with the Lord that your smoldering wick is still hot with flame. If you remember, Jesus rebuked the church of Laodicea because they were neither hot nor cold! The church of Ephesus had forsaken their first love. They thought they were alright, but Jesus said they were not.

That is what sin will do for you. It will make us a "*smoldering wick*." When we lose sight of our relationship with Jesus and hold only to religion, the fire that once burned brightly will grow dim and die.

Everyone without Christ as their personal Savior is an "*extinguished wick*." No fire, no warmth, no life. Without Christ the wick is extinguished. The Bible says we are dead in our sin.

Conclusion: If you are here today and do not know Jesus as your personal Savior, your fire is out. You are an extinguished wick but Jesus wants to light your fire today. He wants to give you new life. He'll do it if you'll come to Him in faith believing that He can forgive you and make you whole.

Are you a bruised reed? Are you a smoldering wick? Jesus wants to bring healing, peace, restoration and forgiveness to you. Won't you come to Him and let Him show you His love and compassion today?