

Behold the Tenderness of Jesus



David Wilkerson June 8, 2015

I once conducted a funeral service for a young man from our church who died of cancer. When I arrived for the service, I was told the young man's mother was the only surviving member of a family of five. Her husband had died three years earlier and her two other sons had also died. This was her fourth funeral and the third son she'd had to bury.

I had prepared a message for that service, but when I saw that mother sitting before me broken, full of pain and sorrow, I couldn't preach it. Instead, I began to pray the tender love of Jesus upon her. Later I did speak for about fifteen minutes, and the Spirit of God flowed through me with a quiet, calm tenderness toward that mother and her friends. I had a very real sense that Jesus saw her deep pain, the crushing sorrow of having to bury four of her dearest ones and being left all alone. I knew in my heart that Christ wanted her to know him in that hour as a tender, caring Savior.

When I got home after the funeral the Holy Spirit led me to Isaiah 42. The prophet Isaiah had been moved upon by the Holy Spirit to bring forth a revelation concerning what the Messiah will be like when he arrives. The opening word, "Behold," meaning, "Prepare for a new revelation," tells us to ready ourselves for a new picture of the Messiah to come.

We find the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy in Matthew 12. Jesus found out that the Pharisees had held a council to plan to kill him. How did he react? "When Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself" (Matthew 12:15). Jesus could have called down a legion of angels to protect himself or called down fire from heaven to consume his enemies. Instead, Jesus merely withdrew from them and continued to minister to the desperate.

Matthew says this was a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: "He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets" (12:19).

Here is what Isaiah's prophecy is saying, in essence: "The Messiah isn't coming to force anybody into his kingdom. He isn't coming as a loud, boisterous, overpowering personality. You won't get to know him by outward signs or by human reasoning. Instead, you'll hear him speak with a still, small voice in your inner man."

I blush when I see TV preachers onstage with a camera following their every movement from all angles. My reaction to all this is, "Why not go through the streets quietly, as Jesus did? Why not heal the sick and then tell those who are healed, 'Keep this quiet. Give all glory to the Lord?'" Consider with me the tenderness of Jesus in two different aspects.

Behold the tenderness of Jesus toward sinners.

How wicked do sinners have to become before God gives up on them? What about serial murder? Is that the last straw? I think of David Berkowitz, known as the notorious Son of Sam, one of the most reviled killers in American history. This man now claims he was saved while in prison, that Jesus is his Lord, and has been leading Bible studies with other prisoners. What are we to make of that? Simply this: God has said his mercies fail not. They are everlasting.

We must get the picture Isaiah portrays about the Savior. He's saying, "I have preached judgment, telling you what is going to happen to Israel. But there's something else you must know about the Messiah. He is coming as a tender deliverer. He's going to set free those who are shut up in depression and despair. No one will be too blind to have their eyes opened by him. No one will be too deaf or too hardened to be healed. And no prison will be able to keep its grip on those he sets free. He can release any sinner from any bondage."

We've got to become acquainted with this Savior, who nurses bruised reeds and hovers over every spark of hunger, ready to fan the flame. I think of Madeline Murray O'Hare as the most notorious atheist of our time. She had two sons, one of whom carried the torch of atheism after her death. But even this woman couldn't keep the Holy Ghost out of her home. Jesus saw a spark in her other son, a man who was broken and bruised because the doctrine his mother espoused didn't satisfy his hurt or deepest inner needs. That son gave his life to Jesus and is preaching the gospel today.

There may be hard cases in your family, at work or in your neighborhood. As you look at their lives you think, "Yes, Jesus has power, but I can't imagine that person ever being reached. I can believe for anyone but him."

I have news for you: that person is probably the one Jesus has his eye on right now. You don't know what's going on inside that person, the pain he carries, the despair he endures. He is bent and bruised, perhaps about to break. But there may be a spark in him that is invisible to the human eye. Do not give up on him. Jesus hasn't. He will not put out any spark.

Behold the tenderness of Jesus toward you.

Often when I look out over our congregation, my heart aches at all the burdens I see people carrying. As I gaze into all the familiar faces, I wonder: "How many of these are the bruised reeds Isaiah talks about?"

Sadly, in some I see a lifelong faith dying out. The bright flame of devotion that was once in them for Jesus is now only a flicker. I ask myself, "Was this one bruised by a phony preacher? By hypocrisy in other Christians? Was that one hurt by someone when she was much younger? Did something in that man's past wound him, or sour him, so that his guard is always up, his heart unable to be penetrated?"

I know a doctor who refuses to enter a church. He was embittered and hardened to Jesus by what he experienced as a child. His father was a preacher who moved their family almost twenty times, uprooting his son over and over. In that boy's eyes his father didn't live what he preached. And the son, now a doctor, is still bruised some forty years later.

Tender Jesus promises, "I won't break you down. And I won't give up on you." He comes to us quietly and lovingly says, "Let me heal that deep bruise. Let me tear down those hard walls and restore you."

I know a Christian man who is one such bruised reed. He has endured a sad divorce, financial setbacks and lawsuits from the IRS for back taxes. He suffers from manic depression, enduring great highs and excruciating lows. At times he has thoughts that life is no longer worth living. He told me he becomes so depressed that he can't think straight.

When I think of this brother, I thank God we have such a tender Savior. Jesus sees such a man as a bruised reed, capable of only a tiny spark of faith. And our Lord won't give up on him.

Consider this word from Isaiah about the Messiah: "He shall not fail nor be discouraged" (Isaiah 42:4). The New American Standard Version translates it this way: "He will not be disheartened or crushed." The New International Version phrases it, "He will not falter or be discouraged." And the original Hebrew reads, "He will not recede [back off], neither will he be crushed, until he has established justice on the earth."

Beloved, Jesus is not going to back off from you. He won't be hindered or stopped until he has done all he can to put you on your feet and set you on fire. Maybe you've failed the Lord terribly. Are you disheartened or discouraged because you wonder how long he can be patient with you, how long he'll put up with your stumbling? Isaiah says he will not be disheartened. Jesus hasn't lost heart over you; he hasn't given up. He is determined to walk with you all the way.

You may ask, “But doesn’t there come a time when Jesus finally says, ‘Enough, it’s all over’? What about all the Scriptures describing nations, people and individuals who were cut off when Israel was finally judged? Saul was cut off. Even in the New Testament, Ananias and Sapphira dropped dead after being judged. Nations and empires have been crushed throughout history.”

The answer to this is also found in Isaiah 42: “Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? Did not the Lord, he against whom we have sinned? For they would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law. Therefore he hath poured upon him the fury of his anger, and the strength of battle: and it hath set him on fire round about, *yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart*” (Isaiah 42:24-25).

The purpose of God’s judgment is always to draw his people back to himself. Israel became so set in their disobedience, so hardened to his Word, divine fury was poured out on them. Yet they were so far gone, so deep in sin, they didn’t even recognize judgment when it came. They were already too dead to feel the heat of judgment.

That is when nothing will work. When we blow out the spark, give up in despair and lie down; when we purposely shut out the Holy Spirit, closing our eyes and ears and hardening our hearts like rocks—we are the ones doing the rejecting. Our Savior’s tenderness is always available. He reaches out lovingly and patiently to every broken reed, to raise us up to new life and hope.

Isaiah leaves us with this precious promise from our tender Lord: “I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them” (42:16).

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