



## **Matthew 12:15–21**

15 Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. A large crowd followed him, and he healed all who were ill. 16 He warned them not to tell others about him. 17 This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

18 “Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him,

and he will proclaim justice to the nations. 19 He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. 20 A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory. 21 In his name the nations will put their hope.”

## **Reflection**

(Today’s talk is given by Craig Tubman)

This next section of Matthew’s gospel begins with the phrase ‘Aware of this Jesus withdrew from that place.’ The ‘this’ which Matthew is referring to is the growing plot by the religious leaders to have Jesus killed!

Things are really starting to heat up in the account of Jesus' life and the opposition to him.

Whilst there will come a time when Jesus sets his direction towards Jerusalem and talks openly of his impending death, that time has seemingly not yet come and we see Jesus withdraw from the scheming religious leaders.

Matthew records Jesus continuing with his healings, but at this point Matthew is not really interested in the details of the healings, but rather the refusal of Jesus to enter into self-promotion. Jesus is stern with those he heals, warning them not to tell others of what he has done.

It is clear that Jesus is not looking for fame or popularity. He is not trying to create a

power base of public opinion off which he can launch a bid for control. I figure the reason for this is that he doesn't need to! Jesus comes as King of the universe - the Son of God. He is not looking for popularity from the very creatures he has made. When you're on a rescue mission, it matters very little whether the ones in danger like your style. What matters is whether you can get the job done.

Author and psychologist Edward Welch wrote in his book *When People are Big, God is Small* that the more we need people, the less we can love them. He was explaining that if we rely solely on other people's opinions to give us identity and purpose then we become so dependent upon pleasing them that we are no longer free to love them. Love requires us to have

a healthy distance so that we can care, advise, rebuke and guide.

This is exactly what we see in Jesus here. For him to fully love us, he can't be dependant on our feelings towards him. In fact time and time again, Jesus refers to the love of his father providing the bedrock for his love for others. And so secure in who he is as the Son of God, he continues on his mission to save.

But here, Matthew throws in a quote from Isaiah 42:1-4. It seems that in chapter 42, Isaiah is prophesying about a day when the nation of Israel – God's servant – will bring justice and hope to all the nations. Of course if you know the Old Testament you'll know it's a story of failure on behalf of Israel as they walk away from God, be-

come more like the nations around them, and fail to stand out amongst them and bring them God's hope.

But here Matthew drops in Isaiah 42 to suggest that in Jesus we have the true expression of everything Israel was meant to be. Jesus takes up the role of the servant and it is now through him that the justice and gentleness of God will come to fulfillment. It's a picture of a servant of immense power but also of great gentleness. He will bring justice but will not bulldoze those in his path.

It's not uncommon for people to seek their version of justice with great noise, trampling over those who are in their way, determined to make sure justice is gained but driven by an aggression that hides a deep

seated fear that they may in fact fail. Matthew could well be thinking of the Jewish group at the time known as Zealots. They were fighting at the time for Israel's liberation from the Romans – doing so with great protests and bloody violence.

Yet in Jesus we see the opposite. I wonder whether it's because Jesus knew that he couldn't fail. There is a quiet confidence in the person of Jesus that comes from a power that cannot be matched. He is able to bring justice without violence towards others, for he is going to take the violence on himself. For Jesus, the cross was to come before the crown.

Because Jesus is everything we cannot be due to our sin, he is set free to love fully and to be marked by gentleness.

“A bruised reed he will not break,  
and a smouldering wick he will  
not snuff out,”

Jesus has been surrounded by those who are bruised and smouldering – the sick, the lame, the outcasts and the desperate. Yet he doesn't cast them to one side in his quest for justice and victory. No, he walks alongside them, he heals them and invites them into the Kingdom of Heaven.

We are told this is open to all people, of all nations for whom Jesus has come to bring hope.

I'm reminded in a passage like this how much we need Jesus. Our world is driven by an obsession with fame, success and dominance. And yet if you scratch beneath



the surface I think you'll find that this is often driven by deep fears. Deep seated fears that we are in fact insignificant, worthless and weak. These fears often drive us to aggressively pursue our goals, to prove to ourselves that everything is ok. That our life has some sort of meaning.

When Jesus invites us to join the Kingdom of Heaven, as he has been doing in Matthew's gospel, it is an invitation to a whole new life. It's new precisely because it pulls us out of the endless cycle of needing to prove ourselves. You can come to Jesus with your fears, your pain and your confusion and he will not break you or put you out. In fact the only way to approach God is with your guard down. In humility. Trusting that he knows you (all of you, not just the external bits that others see!), he loves

you and he wants to move you closer to himself and into his kingdom.

This is the kingdom in which you are eternally loved by the King, he gave his life to secure yours! And we have a new identity given to us by God himself as sons and daughters of his eternal family. When fully grasped this obliterates any desperate need to seek fame, success or dominance on our quest for meaning.

Jesus was set free to love others because his source of love was from his Father. And Jesus invites us into this same life. To know that we are loved by God and part of his eternal kingdom loosens the power of the opinions of others and that places you in a position to love them more.

Praise be to Jesus, that whilst he is all pow-

erful, the very Son of God, he is gentle with us and leads us with patience and love.

## **Think & Pray**

Take some time today to reflect upon the gentleness and patience God has shown you in your own journey of faith. Consider where your true identity and value lies. Do you let it come from God? Or from the opinions of others? Consider how needing people's affirmation a little less would set you free to love them more.

And why not bring all these things before God in prayer.