

## The Servant of the Lord

Matt. 12:15-23

**Intro.** There's an interesting story about a little boy who was hospitalized during the reign of King George V. I wasn't born yet, but I think Pastor Jerry was. In that British hospital the patients were told the king would pay them a visit that day. Though confined to their beds, each patient who could, put on their best clothing as they waited for the king's arrival. This one little boy was so excited to see the king. It was visitor's day and all day long a number of visitors came by. About 4 PM a man escorted by a number of men entered the hospital. Dressed in ordinary street clothes, the man went from ward to ward. He spoke to a number of children...even this young boy who was still waiting to see the king. He spoke very kindly and then left. That night, as the boy was getting ready for bed he spoke to the nurse and said, "Nurse, I'm sad the king didn't come!" The nurse replied, "Oh, but the king did come! Don't you remember that nice elderly man who came over and patted you on the head? He spoke so kindly to you." The boy said, "Yes, I remember him." She said, "That was the king." "But nurse," the boy said, "He didn't have his crown on!"

That's the way it was when King Jesus came the first time. He didn't have His crown on. The Jews expected a Messiah who was strong / outspoken / victorious / and triumphant...a Messiah who would throw off Roman tyranny and restore their sovereignty. Yet Jesus came in meekness and gentleness. His appearance was ordinary and His voice was calm. In the words of **Phil. 2:7- He made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.** Like that little boy, most people failed to recognize King Jesus when He was here. He seemed ordinary and more like a servant than a sovereign. Oh, but listen...when Jesus comes the second time, every eye will recognize Him and every knee will bow to His majesty. But this AM I simply want to say this...the Jesus who came without His crown...is precisely the savior the world desperately needs.

In our previous study we found that Israel's religious leaders accused Jesus of violating God's laws regarding the Sabbath. They hoped to discredit Him. This was tough sledding in the face of such amazing miracles and crowd appeal! Their attitude was, "Don't confuse us with the facts, our minds are made up. He isn't the sort of Messiah we're interested in." Yet Jesus was and is God's Messiah, His servant-king. As a result of the fall, resistance to God is built in every one of us. Along with inner resistance, Satan has made it his business to blind us to the truth. As Paul wrote in **II Cor. 4:4 – The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.**

In **v.14** – the jealousy and hatred of these leaders hardened. **But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.** Think of the irony. These religious men were infuriated that Christ's disciples picked and ate some barley on the Sabbath...but they felt justified for wanting to kill Him. Their hypocrisy illustrates what Jesus meant when He said, "**you strain out a gnat while swallowing a camel.**" Their anger intensified when Jesus healed a man's shriveled hand on the Sabbath and foiled their plan by logic that left them speechless. In the flow of the chapter the next question is this...how would Jesus respond? Would He resist their injustice and fight back? If Jesus is the Messiah, surely He can silence a few hostile clerics! Ancient kings wasted no time eliminating rivals and those hostile to their reign. That's how Herod responded to John the Baptist. But Jesus wasn't like jealous monarchs...He came as the servant-king.

Though I typically set aside a book study for a Palm Sunday message, my study convinced me that **Matt.12:15-23**, set the stage for the Passion Week. They reveal the growing hostility but they do something more...they reveal Jesus as He is. They reveal His patience and compassion as the the Servant of God and Servant of man. They prepare us to understand why Jesus was presented to Israel without the pomp and pageantry so typical of eastern kings. They flesh out what the prophet Zechariah meant when He said...

**Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (9:9)** They explain why Jesus didn't retaliate when He could have.

So the verses before us this AM are primarily Christological...they emphasize the gentleness, humility and patience of Jesus, the Servant of the Lord. Imagine the paradox. The Sovereign of the Universe ...a servant! What unexpected condescension! The Omnipotent Creator...allowing Himself to be falsely accused / tried like a common criminal / beaten and nailed to a wooden cross! The righteous all-knowing judge of the Universe...silent before His accusers. How could this be? So **chap.12** sets the stage and prepares us to understand why the events described in **Matt. 26-28** unfolded as they did. My prayer is that with grateful hearts, we'll see Jesus more clearly and love Him for the great servant-king He is.

**1. The unprecedented patience of God's servant-king – vs.15, 16 - Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. Many followed him, and He healed all their sick, warning them not to tell who he was.**

Because Jesus knows everything, He was fully **aware of** the Pharisee's hostility. He knew Israel's leaders were laying plans to kill Him. So why not launch a pre-emptive strike? That's what other kings did. That's what some of us might recommend. Why not call down a battalion of angels? Instead, Jesus **withdrew from that place**. He didn't withdraw out of fear or panic. He **withdrew** because He didn't come to wage war with unbelievers or eliminate His opposition. He came to seek and to save the lost. And everybody is savable...even the most religious like Nicodemus and the most zealous Pharisee like Saul of Tarsus. The way the Spirit of Christ patiently deals with people today is no different. God's Spirit won't over-power human will or force His way into our lives. Though there are occasions when we wish God would send lightning on somebody, the Lord is merciful and patient toward those who hate Him. He won't fight us. But if we persist in unbelief...if we continue to refuse Him, a day may come when He must withdraw from us. In **Gen. 6:3** the Lord warned...**"My Spirit will not contend with man forever..."** Nothing is more terrible than to have Christ withdraw from you.

I poked a big black snake with a golf club one day. He was lying in the sun and minding his own business but coiled tighter than I thought. When I poked him he sprang two feet and almost bit me. Ruined my golf game! Rather than further provoke these Pharisaical vipers, Jesus **withdrew**. It wasn't the time or place for Him to be arrested / tried / and nailed to a cross. As we'll see in **chaps. 13-25**, Jesus had places to go / things to do / and disciples to teach. His work wasn't finished. Earlier, when those of his hometown tried to push Him over a cliff, Jesus passed through the crowd untouched...like the Hebrews when they passed through the Red Sea. Events like these demonstrate His omniscience and sovereign control. You may watch Killing Jesus tonight. The title is misleading because no one killed Jesus...He voluntarily laid down His life. He said that in **Jn. 10:8** – **"No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again."** In obedience to His Father's plan, our servant-king endured suffering and shame for us. The cross was no mistake or after-thought. Christ's suffering and sacrificial death was determined before creation. (**Rev. 13:8**) But notice the contrast! Blinded by jealousy and hatred, Israel's leaders wanted to eliminate Jesus...but many Galileans followed Him. The needy were drawn by His merciful healing power. The religious leaders couldn't deny His power but saw Him as a threat to their pathetic little empire.

Notice that Jesus instructed those He healed not to tell anyone who He was. What a strange way to propel a movement and build a kingdom...how un-evangelistic and unexpected! In a world where ego driven men are praised and promoted for their accomplishments...this seems strange. But Jesus didn't operate the way rising stars or aspiring politician do.

He resisted the adulation and applause most men crave and use to build their platform. Besides that, the miracles Jesus performed were merely signs which served to identify Him as the Messiah. We tend to think miracles produce faith, but they don't! Seeing is not believing...believing is believing! With their own eyes, the Pharisees saw every amazing miracle Jesus performed but refused to believe. Why? Because seeing isn't believing! Faith is produced as we humbly seek the Lord and respond to His Word. **(Rom. 10:17)** The decision to believe or reject is a matter of the will.

**v.16** says, **He healed all their sick.** Make a note of that...the hostility of Israel's leaders didn't deter Jesus from completing His mission. He didn't react to their rejection...He simply continued His work in another town. Yet how many times have we quit a ministry because we encountered a little criticism, opposition or lack of appreciation? Shame on us! Jesus is the model servant. He knew what God sent Him to do and nothing could dissuade Him from doing it.

But notice this too...the verse says, **He healed all their sick.** We saw this earlier in **Matt. 8:16 - When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick.** Today we hear of services where a few people are healed in a controlled environment. We're skeptical and for good reason. When Jesus went to a town, He healed every sick person instantly and completely. Because His healings served as a sign, Jesus healed people whether they believed in Him or not. The same was true of the apostles. Concerning Paul, **Acts 19:11, 12** says, **God did extra-ordinary miracles through Paul, so that even hand-kerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.** If modern faith-healers have the ability to heal the sick the way Jesus did, why don't they go to hospitals and empty them out?

Now be sure you hear what I'm saying and not saying. Christ is a healer and He is the same yesterday, today and forever. On some occasions God's will is to heal those who are sick. He can do that. In faith, we pray for God's healing. But until Jesus returns, supernatural healing isn't always God's will or none of us would ever die. God has not yet removed sickness, aging or accidental death from this fallen world. That's why we have gray hair and vanishing hair. That's why we have aching joints and fallen arches. That's why we need doctors, medicines and hospitals. Since the first century, God has not given men the ability to heal the way Jesus did. Both the Bible and the historical record insist this unique ability ended with the last apostle. The sign gifts that enabled men to work miracles and heal the sick fulfilled their purpose and were removed. But don't miss this...Jesus and His apostles healed everybody! But even though God's servant-king went about doing more good than anyone before Him had ever done, He was hated without a cause! But isn't it true...we need the kind of servant-king who has the power to heal everyone and restore order to God's creation?

## **2. The unexpected profile of God's Servant-king – vs. 17-20 - This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:**

At this point Matthew reached back 600 years to quote **Isa. 42:1-4**. He quoted these verses to remind his Jewish readers of the unexpected profile of God's Messiah. The profile of God's servant-king was prophesied centuries earlier. Under the guidance of God's Spirit, these verses prove the Messianic expectations of the Jews were off the mark and incorrect. Let's see what they got wrong...

The Lord God of Israel is the speaker in **v.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.** Notice the noun God chose to describe Israel's coming Messiah...the Lord said, He is **my servant**. Unlike kings who exercise their own will and seek their own glory, the Lord's chosen one is a **servant** who comes to do God's will not His own. In **Jn. 4:34** Jesus said, **"My food...is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."**

Again in **Heb. 10:7** Jesus is the speaker. **“Then I said, ‘Here I am--it is written about me in the scroll-- I have come to do your will, O God.’”** As a servant, **Phil. 2:7, 8** says Jesus was **obedient to death-- even death on a cross!** Peter O’Brien in his commentary on Philippians wrote, *“It seems best on balance to understand the expression, “taking on the form of a servant” against the background of slavery in contemporary society. Slavery pointed to the extreme deprivation of one’s rights, even those relating to one’s own life and person.”* So Jesus put God’s will ahead of His own. Somehow the Jewish people missed this, but God said their Messiah would come as a servant.

Notice the Lord also said His servant would be chosen / loved / the object of His delight or pleasure / and that He would put His Spirit on Him. This prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus was baptized. **Matt. 3:16, 17** say, **As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”** Notice Isaiah also prophesied, **He will proclaim justice to the nations.** Justice is a synonym for righteousness. True righteousness is what the Sermon on the Mount is about. Righteousness is the summary of all that Christ taught to Jew and Gentile alike. Then in **vs.19, 20** Isaiah included a few more details about the character and ministry of God’s servant-king.

- **v. 19 - He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets.** This doesn’t mean God’s servant would never speak up. It means He would not be the type who resorts to heated arguments or shouting matches. Nobody in Israel was ever drawn to their window by the noise of Jesus quarreling with people on the street. I’m reminded of the perfect English butler in the movie entitled, “The remains of the day.” Though provoked to the limit by the obnoxious stuffed shirts who were guests at Darlington Hall, this butler (who had more intelligence and insight than any of those blowhards) refused to be drawn into their arguments. Like Jesus, the butler never left his role as a servant. In the same way, the NT instructs elders to not be **violent but gentle, not quarrelsome.**

- **v. 20 - A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory.** A **bruised reed** is a reed bent and almost broken off by the wind. It’s weak and useless. A **smoldering wick** has just a tiny flame that is close to going out. Jesus used these metaphors to describe the condition of Israel’s leaders. They were weak and flickering. They were sin-damaged. When they insulted and refused Him, Jesus could have destroyed them as easily as a man breaks a **bruised reed** or snuffs out a **smoldering wick**. He had the power to do that. But rather than annihilate these men on the spot, **Jesus withdrew**. This is what **meekness** means and **mercy** does. It’s having the power to smash somebody, but choosing not to. It’s walking away when insulted and falsely accused. While the metaphors apply primarily to Israel’s leaders, every sinner is broken and smoldering. Every sinner has offended God. So the **broken reed** and **smoldering wick** also refer to people in their natural state...people damaged by sin and bad choices...people weighed down by life and without hope. Their life hangs on by a thread, but they’re still breathing. As long as there’s a thread and a flicker...Christ wants to save them. In these verses we see the mercy and compassion of God’s servant-king. It’s demonstrated by His patience toward the broken. Jesus didn’t come to finish sinners off, He came to rescue us. Think of it this way...if Jesus was willing to forgive and save those who hated and plotted to kill Him...no one is too far gone or beyond the reach of His mercy. Let me say it again, Jesus is exactly the kind merciful savior-king we need.

But there’s something we could easily overlook in **v. 20**. Let’s read it again. **A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory.** You might want to circle or underline the word, **till**. For the time being, Jesus won’t break a bruised reed or snuff out a smoldering wick. But this won’t always be the case. Time is marching toward a terminus...a pre-planned destination. God’s servant-king is patient and long-suffering today. He withdraws from rebels who resist His kingdom but He won’t wage war against them.

Christ has compassion even for merciless terrorists who burn churches and martyr His people! That's why we're taught to pray for enemies and those who persecute us. **II Pet. 3:9** says, **The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.** But Christ's merciful disposition will continue only until **He leads justice to victory.** The phrase, **leads justice to victory,** looks ahead to that time when Jesus returns in power and glory. On that day, justice or righteousness will triumph over every form of injustice and evil. **II Thess. 1:6-8** say, **God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.** Don't miss this...certain victory is ahead. Jesus is gonna win!

When He returns, the promise of **v.21** will come to pass – **“In His name the nations will put their hope.”** It was inconceivable to a Jew that Gentile nations could ever be reconciled to God. They neither believed it nor did they want it to happen. But Gentile salvation had already begun when Jesus was here and it has continued through the church age as the Gospel is proclaimed to **every tribe and language and people and nation. (Rev. 5:9)** People in every part of the world are trusting Christ for salvation and it's exciting to be part of God's plan! Yet a day is coming when false gods and religious pluralism will be history. **Zech. 14:9** promises - **The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name.**

So don't be misled by the meek and lowly demeanor of the Lord Jesus. He came the first time as the **Lamb of God**, but He comes the second time as the **Lion of Judah.** Jesus is forever the servant of God and man, but at the time of His return Christ will exchange His servant's garb for the robes of a judge and king...the King of kings and Lord of lords. Like that little boy, the Jewish people didn't recognize their Messiah without His royal crown. But catching a glimpse of His return, John wrote in **Rev. 14:14** - **I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one "like a son of man" with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand.**

**3. The unlimited power of God's Servant King – vs. 22, 23** - **Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?"**

I've never been accused of being a *"hyper-typer"* who sees symbolic meanings in every Bible verse. But I can't escape the apparent linkage between this event and the verses we just studied. As we've said before, circumstances were never out of Christ's control. Exercising His sovereignty as Lord of all, Jesus coordinated every event. There were no chance happenings. So I think this demon-possessed man was brought to Jesus **then** (as **v. 22** says) to illustrate the truth emphasized here.

So let me suggest that the **demon** that possessed this man represents the Adversary. Satan holds humanity hostage in bonds of sin and death. His control over the human race is declared in **I Jn. 5:19** - **We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.** The **whole world** means what?...the whole world...everyone. The writer of Hebrews states the reason Jesus came in **Heb. 2:14, 15** - **Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.** So as God's servant, Jesus came to neutralize the devil's control over every human being.

The **man** possessed by the demon represents any person who has not yet trusted Christ for salvation. We can be thankful demon possession is not more prevalent in America as it is in other more primitive cultures. But having said that...some forms of mental illness may be misdiagnosed.

Science has long denied the supernatural because belief in a spirit world opens the door to the possibility of God's existence. And, of course, that's untenable! Yet the unseen world is inhabited by legions of spirit beings cast from heaven when Lucifer sinned. The Bible says Satan is a deceiver and a destroyer. That's his MO. **I Tim. 4:1** warns us of his deceitful influence. **The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.** The teachings of Islam and those of various cults, isms and schools of philosophy are in fact, **things taught by demons.** At the same time, horrific acts of cruelty where lives are brutally destroyed may well be the result of demonic influence and activity. Who could watch the beheadings of 30 Egyptian Christians and not think of Satan, the destroyer? What inner impulse would cause that co-pilot to take his own life and the lives of 149 passengers? Where does such evil originate?

In this context, the possessed **man** represents **bruised reeds** and **smoldering wicks**. He represents the Pharisees in their hostility as well as every person under Satan's control who resists God's servant-king. Because of the demon, the man was **blind** and couldn't see. In **Matt. 15:14** Jesus said the Pharisees were **blind guides**. Think that through. What might happen if a blind person walks a dangerous path while relying on a blind guide? Jesus didn't wait for an answer, He said, **"If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit."** Remember **II Cor. 4:4 - The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.**

Along with blindness, this demon-possessed man was **mute**. He couldn't speak. In the OT, the psalmist considered muteness an appropriate punishment for liars. **Psa. 31:18 - Let their lying lips be silenced, for with pride and contempt they speak arrogantly against the righteous.** That indictment fits the Pharisees to a tee. With pride and contempt they spoke arrogantly against God's Messiah. Yet the same spiritual condition applies to all who were given lips to praise God but can't do it because they have believed Satan's lie. I'm no one's judge, but when people come to church but refuse to sing, we have to wonder if they're saved and filled with God's Spirit. The NT says singing is an evidence of a Spirit-filled heart. **(Eph. 5:19)** But like this man, many are mute and silent. There's no praise on their lips. So this man who couldn't see or speak is an accurate picture of Israel and the world in unbelief and denial of Christ. Yet **v.22** says, **Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see.** Once again, Jesus demonstrated His unlimited power and authority. By a word from His mouth, demons flee and function is restored to paralyzed vocal chords and blinded eyes. Crown or not, we need a servant- king like Jesus who has power to heal and restore. Am I right about that?

**v.23** says, **All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?"** The wording of their question reveals doubtfulness and a negative response. Despite the miracle and the astonishment it generated, the people were uncertain but quite sure Jesus wasn't the Messiah they were looking for. Most people missed Him because Jesus didn't meet their expectations.

This AM we see Jesus without His crown. He came as the servant of God, but He came to be our servant as well. His arms were stretched out on a Roman cross for every one of us. But Jesus is often overlooked because He isn't like any king or politician we've ever known. He comes in humility and with extraordinary compassion...even for those who hate Him! Though every sinner is a rebel at heart, Jesus doesn't wage war against us. He doesn't force anyone to trust Him. With great patience He endures our insults, our rejection, and our failures...though repeated hostility may cause Him to withdraw. As God's servant-king, He doesn't despise us because of our sin and bad choices. In mercy, He has no interest in breaking us more than we are or snuffing us out. Instead, with great patience He reasons and pleads with us. But for anyone who comes to Him, His power is unleashed ...power that breaks Satan's grip...power that saves and transforms our lives. This is the Lord Jesus...the servant-king without His crown. He isn't the kind of king the Jews wanted, but He's the kind of savior we all need. Have you trusted Him? Have you responded to His offer?