

Christ's Unfailing Gentleness and Power

by James Blaine Chapman

Jesus' gentleness and power are demonstrated in His response to opposition and persecution, and His promise of judgment leading to victory brings hope and salvation to all who trust in Him.

Scripture: Psalm 147:3, Isaiah 42:1, Matthew 12:18, Matthew 12:38, Mark 3:1, Mark 3:31, Luke 11:14, Romans 15:12, Hebrews 11:6

Topics: "Jesus Christ", "Gentle Redemption"

Description

James Blaine Chapman preaches on the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah regarding Jesus, emphasizing how Jesus faced opposition and persecution with unwavering patience and gentleness, refusing to be drawn into useless arguments. Despite relentless attacks and false accusations, Jesus continued His works of mercy and healing, demonstrating compassion and love even to the weakest and most sinful. Chapman highlights Jesus' ability to restore and uplift those who are broken and struggling, assuring that in His name, all, including the Gentiles, can find trust and salvation.

Transcript

Behold my servant whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall show judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust (Matthew 12:18-21).

This text appears first in the opening verses of the forty-second chapter of Isaiah, and is quoted by Matthew to show how fitly it was fulfilled in the life of Jesus. Aside from this quotation, practically the whole of the twelfth chapter of Matthew is taken up with the record of opposition to Jesus and to persecution on the part of His enemies. The text has therefore been called "a beautiful picture on a dark background."

The chapter begins with the record of Jesus and His disciples passing through the barley fields on the Sabbath day, and, following the custom and the law, they plucked a few heads of grain and shelled them out to meet their need for food, but, so intent were His enemies on finding fault, that they accused Jesus and His followers of breaking the Sabbath, and tried to injure His influence for good by spreading this report abroad. This opposition was the more irritating because it was so petty, yet Jesus answered them never a word.

Then the story seems to pass to the next Sabbath, and records the instance of Jesus' healing the man with the withered arm. There in the presence of the multitude Jesus called the man to stand up and stretch forth his arm. Immediately his arm was whole as the other, and the people marveled. The enemies of Christ, however, were by no means reconciled by this good work, but were filled with settled malice, and sought counsel as to how they might destroy Him.

Another week passes, and we come to the record of Jesus' casting out a devil. This was the highest type of work Jesus did while on earth, and its evident accomplishment in the sight of the people made explanation by the Pharisees inescapable. In their straits these wretched men said, "He is in league with Beelzebub, the prince of evil spirits, and makes a show of casting out lesser spirits that He may the more effectively deceive the people and lead them astray." Just as the casting out of evil spirits represented the highest form of work for the Master, it gave rise to the deepest sin on the part of His opposers. Crediting the work of God as the work of the devil is approaching blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, and of this Jesus gave them solemn warning, explaining to them that such a sin has no pardon. If one stops to think for just a moment he will see how this conclusion follows; for if one sets himself to credit God's work to the devil, then the more God deals with him the farther away he will be driven, since he will believe and say that all he hears and feels is the work of the enemy. "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for, he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

Then the persecutors came, and in derision said, "Master, show us a sign from heaven." Thus they would set aside all the mighty works which He had done as of no consequence, and say, "Make the heavens dark above us. Or cause a new star to appear. Or bring on a storm. Or cause writing to appear in the sky." Thus was revealed the willful hardening on the part of these enemies, and their determination not to be convinced.

The climax of it all came when the mother and brethren of our Lord joined in with the persecutors and came after Him to take Him away. Word was sent to the front, "Thy mother and thy brethren stand without seeking thee." The words sound innocent enough when spoken in just that way, but in the parallel reading in Mark we are made to see that what was really implied, and that so openly that all hearers understood, was that His mother and his brethren thought Him crazy and beside Himself and had come to take Him home, accounting Him incompetent to either teach or take care of Himself. To charge Him as being a madman was to bring Him into disrepute, and this must have been the hardest trial of all to the gentle, loving Son of God.

In every instance Jesus refused to be irritated or to be led into useless caviling and argument. This was the meaning of the words of the prophet. There is no reference to street and open air preaching, we know, for in this blessed exercise few have exceeded the Son of God. He answered the objections to the barley field occurrence by citing from the Scriptures the instance in which David, whom His persecutors professed to revere, had transgressed the usual standards of conduct in the interest of the higher laws of life, and sought to show them that God deals in mercy and not in legal severity, and that the Sabbath and all the institutions of God and men were made for men, and not men made for them. When latent malice broke out into open threats over His healing of the man with the withered arm, He silently withdrew from the vicinity and patiently continued His works of mercy and His preaching of the gospel of salvation. When men made the most terrible accusation against Him in saying He was in league with the devil, He defended Himself with irrefutable logic in showing that a house divided against itself cannot stand, but He spoke His words in gentleness and temperance. "If Satan cast out Satan," said the Great Teacher, "then his kingdom will fall." And for this the people should rejoice. Instead of complaining that an unseemingly

thing is occurring, they should all join in gladness that the end of evil is in sight. The demand for a sign from heaven was met by a reference to the miracle of miracles yet to occur -His own resurrection from the dead. The bitter words of His own relatives was answered by waving His hand to indicate His followers, and by words which indicated that the closest relationships are based upon spiritual kinship, and not on mere earthly blood ties.

The Son of God came through all opposition unruffled and unoffended. And He proved Himself the heir to the Messianic prophecy recorded in the text, "He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust."

The language here is highly metaphorical, but was plain to those to whom it was addressed. The bruised reed was a reference to nature beneath. The smoking flax was a reference to a familiar housekeeper's situation. Jesus was a keen observer of nature and of the habits of the people among whom He moved. "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests," said He on another occasion, and then set this over against His own earthly homelessness and comparative friendlessness. "Behold the sower," He invited, and then went on to preach of the sowing of the Word of God, and to estimate the harvest which truth produces in the good soil of a willing and obedient heart. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." And then followed His great lesson on trust in God, for He continued, "If God so clothe the grass which today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" He spoke of the Father's notice of the falling sparrow, but only in order to set forth God's specific care of His children, even to the hairs of their heads.

Jesus observed, nature, but He worshipped God only. The worship of nature has ever been the substitute for spiritual life and reverence of the personal God. An admirer once claimed that Robert E. Ingersoll, the "free thinker," was the best man of his day. In proof of this he cited Ingersoll's regard for nature. He was careful when out for a walk to avoid, as far as possible, the crushing of a worm or insect. In his room he would not even kill a fly that tormented him, saying the fly had a right to live and to live its own way. This man, however, had no scruples against taking away the chart and compass from the little child about to set sail upon the sea of life. He possessed no conscience in the matter of removing the principal bulwarks from men during the years of temptation and exposing them to the ravages of sin and abandoning them to the fires of fleshly passions. He would even stoop to dig away the crumbling earth beneath the feet of the aged and gray, taking away their hope for the life to come and compelling them to plunge into the gulf of despair while dying without God. I cannot crown one as a "good man" who thus disregards his fellow men, no matter what interest he may show toward nature beneath him.

We cannot believe that Jesus spent His time lifting up and repairing bruised reeds along the banks of the Jordan River, although the metaphor suggests such an occupation. Jesus was interested in men, and the bruised reed stands for a certain class and type of men.

The reed in its usual state was typical of proud, impenitent men. Its trunk was thin and its strength was small, so that it swayed even in the gentle breeze, but it was unaware of its limitations and relative helplessness. It held its head high, away up among the cedars and the firs, and seemed to say to passers-by, "Look at me. I am about as good as anybody."

Once the reed became bent at right angles and bruised in the process it was unable to recover itself. It was certain to perish unless some outside hand came to its aid to correct and sustain it until it could recover its poise and strength again. With its head bowed low, and its confession of helplessness, the bruised reed became a type of the penitent sinner who beats upon his breast, and cries, "God, be merciful to me a sinner."

The reed was never very valuable, but it was not aware of it until it became bruised. In its best state one would not think of bestowing much time or care upon it. But when it became bruised -- who would stop to straighten and bind it up? For the most part, men would pass it by, or carelessly stoop to break it completely. That is the way worldly men look at confessed sinners. They accept the sinner's own estimate of himself, and let it go at that. They may honor the proud, unbent reed, but they will break the useless, bruised reed. It is not so with Jesus. He stopped a whole procession to listen to the plea of the blind beggar by the side of the Jericho road. He turned from the lofty conversation of Simon the Pharisee to pardon the sins of a poor woman from the streets who stooped to wash His feet with her tears and dry them with her hair. He encouraged the poor to gather about Him. He laid His hand in blessing upon the children of tired and discouraged mothers. The poor leper, whom others would not allow to approach, He touched with the hand of gentleness and cleansed with the word of His power. A poor foreign woman whose daughter was possessed with devils, and who herself accepted a place with the dogs under the table, could get His ear and move His healing hand. Even when a need was so great that it made a petitioner mute, Jesus would read the appeal in the anxious look and would answer the call, no matter how heavy the draft.

Jesus is like that today. No one is ever turned away who kneels at Jesus' feet. Poverty, ignorance, sin and shame are not impossible barriers to the penitent soul who would come into the Master's presence. A humble and contrite heart He will not despise. "All the fitness Christ requireth is to feel your need of Him." John Newton, Jerry MacAuley, Nellie Conroy, Gipsy Smith, Bud Robinson, the Japanese "gentleman in prison," what a motley crowd they were when they came to Jesus! Successors they were to such other bruised reeds as Mary of Magdala, David the murderer, and the thief on the cross. People whom no one else will have, Jesus will take. And He does not take them into doubtful disputation, but accepts them as His own. He does not leave them bent and bruised, but lifts them up, binds up their wounds, and gives them life and hope anew. He "sends forth judgment unto victory." Judgment is usually the precursor of punishment. But Jesus makes it the precursor of victory. Conviction for sin leads to forgiveness of sins. Judgment leads to pardon. Confession presages testimony. In the presence of Christ the way up is down. "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Once when I invited a man to come to Christ, he said, "It's no use. You do not know how wicked I have been. Christ will not take me." I answered him thus, "Well, I want you to come any way, for either you are mistaken, and Christ will take you, or else you will be the most famous man in history. A million years from now the angels will still be pointing you out and saying, 'There he is. The first man Jesus would not take. Until he came, Jesus took all who came, but when this man came, the Master refused him.'" The man came, but he will not be famous for the cause I suggested, for Jesus took him, and there yet remains to be found one whom He will not take. "A bruised reed he will not break" -- so tender is He -- "till he send forth judgment unto victory" -- so mighty is He.

Now we come to the claim that He will not "quench smoking flax . . . till he send forth judgment unto victory." Just as Jesus was not primarily interested in the things of nature, but saw men and the needs of men in the things of nature, so He is not primarily interested in the details of housekeeping, although He

did notice these insignificant things. He spoke of the leaven which the woman hid in three measures of meal in the process of breadmaking. He spoke of the woman who lost the coin from her dowry, but His concern was for the kingdom of heaven and for the lost soul of whom the lost coin was but a type. Here attention is drawn to the little earthen vessel or the shell of a gourd which is filled with vegetable oil or animal fat, and supplied with a flaxen wick and used as a means of lighting the house. When the oil supply was exhausted, the flame fed for a time upon the wick and then gave way to smoke and unpleasant odor filled all the house. Under such conditions the usual custom was for the housekeeper to quench the coal entirely, and start anew with a new oil supply and with a freshened wick. There was yet the possibility of replenishing the oil supply and then blowing with gentle breath upon the latent coal until the flame was kindled again.

Fire is a type of life, even of divine life. Then the smoking flax stands for the weak and faltering believer, for the slipping disciple and the soul that has not yet "gone on to perfection." There are multitudes of such souls everywhere. They are a grief to pastors and the anxiety of fellow Christians. The temptation is just to "drop their names," and account them not worth saving. But Jesus would not do it. He would pour in new oil, blow gently upon the latent spark, and get the flame of testimony going again.

We often get greatly agitated about abstract causes. But Jesus was exercised over individual souls. Sometimes we become so concerned in saving the cause that we are like to damn souls to do it. But Jesus saved souls, even when He seemed to imperil the cause to do it. He ate with publicans and sinners that He might lead them to the right. He allowed a sinful woman to approach Him and to wash His feet. He called a tax-gatherer from his perch in a tree and became guest in his house. Finally, He gave His life to save that of Barabbas the robber.

When we see a young Christian whose testimony is more smoke than flame, we are inclined to say, "Well, I guess he did not really get through." If one who did follow the Master stumbles or hesitates, we are likely to say, "Take his name off the book." But Jesus would not do it. He had patience with Peter's weakness, with Thomas' doubts, with John's and James' pride and self-seeking and with the shallow thinking of all His band. He would not quench the smoking flax of the weakest prayer. He did not blow on the smoldering spark with cyclonic breath, but in gentleness and mercy He breathed upon the weak and struggling until new fire was kindled. He snuffs off the ashes of neglect, blows upon the latent, smoldering love, and pours in the oil of His own free spirit until the weak soul becomes strong, and the spirit of triumph replaces the spirit of discouragement.

The work of Christ is not negative only; for He sends forth "judgment unto victory." Judgment is usually a hard word, for usually it expresses threatened consequences of our own shortcomings. But in this case it is a blessed and precious word, for it tells of God's taking up the cause of the poor and needy and scattering the enemies that threaten his destruction. It is not judgment coming upon us, but judgment exercised in our behalf. The Psalms, the hymn book of the Old Testament Church, is almost a dictionary of military terms, for David was a man of war and his vocabulary included almost everything used in armed conflict. In his hymns of praise he described God by use of words involving the most dreadful military appurtenances. God is to him a fortress. A fortress is a vicious thing if you are on the outside trying to get in, but David was on the inside, and the fortress kept others from getting in. To David a fortress was a thing of joy; to David God was a shield, a buckler, and a warrior who could not be defeated. Because God was on his side, David rejoiced that He was so strong and unconquerable. And it is thus with the promise of judgment in the text before us. This judgment leads to victory. God will judge the foes of the man who puts his trust in Him. He will judge the sins of the man who believes on His name. He will espouse the

cause of the soul who sets out to follow Him. He will break the power of canceled sin and set the captive spirit free. He will protect and defend the cause of everyone who identifies himself with Him. He will turn defeat into victory and bring out "more than conqueror every soul that is steadfast unto the end.

The climax of all is reached in the final statement, "In his name shall the Gentiles trust." There is a gradation leading to a climax in the promises relating to Messiah. When God's ancient people were peeled and scattered, the faith of inspired seers arose above the confusion and described the wisdom and strength of the Coming One who would gather the people of Israel near and far and save them with an outstretched arm. All the true sons of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were bidden to rejoice in the prospect of a deliverance that would surpass in glory their fondest hopes. So mighty was the faith of these seers of visions" that they believed God would regard the blood of the patriarchs in so full a manner that even the Samaritans in whose veins but a few drops of the precious fluid courses could yet be saved. "The land of Zabulon and the land of Naphtholim [Samaria of the days of Jesus], by the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; the people which sat in darkness saw a great light: and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up" (Isaiah 9:1, 2). It was with the supreme reach of confidence that one finally pushed clear up above the clouds, and triumphantly announced as a climax, "And in his name shall the Gentiles trust." This was a declaration of the all sufficiency of the royal blood of Jesus Christ the Saviour. Men without pedigree can come -- He will furnish the blood Himself. Men without anyone to recommend and without anything to commend can come, saying, "In my hand no price I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling." Every sin of every man is covered, every want is met, every power of evil is broken and defeated, every privilege of the gospel is opened up for every man. "In his name shall the Gentiles trust." This is saying that none are so bad, but that Jesus will forgive; none are so polluted but that His blood will wash them and make them white. We are called upon to disregard every hindrance and forget every disqualification, and shout out to all, "Whosoever will, let him come!"

It is to the glory of Christ and His blessed gospel that He does not call the good only, but that He challenges the worst to come. No matter how far away and how wicked and sinful one may be, if he will turn quickly and start to Christ, by the time he reaches Christ he will be all right. He may start as one unfit for the company of decent men, but by the time he arrives he will be good company for the angels.

When Jesus Christ was on earth He exercised an unlimited healing ministry. Halt, blind, lame, deaf, leprous, palsied -- "He healed them all." Even the dead He brought back to life again. Today His sphere of operation is more distinctly the spiritual, although He does heal the body in answer to the prayer of faith. In this spiritual sphere He is as limitless as He used to be in the physical. He does not specialize on certain types and kinds of sinners -- He saves them all.

And what more can we say? It is a wonderful heritage to be the child of Christian parents and to have the advantages of early Christian training. If you have had these favors, be thankful and make the most of your good start. If you have been converted early in life, remember you have yet been saved from the grossest sins, for the chances are you would have fallen into them, but for the grace of God. But if you had no praying mother, remember still you have an intercessor at God's right hand who does not forget to bear your name there. If you were denied a father to advise, do not forget there is One who knows and cares. If you have drifted so far away that it seems an eternity would not suffice for you to come back over the infinite space that separates you from God and a holy life, remember it is only half as far to God as it seems to be, for the moment you start toward Him, He also starts toward you, and as the father met the prodigal down the road, so God will meet you, if you come as a penitent sinner. If you have been a habitual backslider until you have been dubbed "a chronic seeker," so that few are able any more to hold

hope for your establishment, do not despair. Christ is merciful. If your voice in prayer sounds to you like the voice of a lone lamb off on the mountainside, remember it is a good Shepherd that seeks you, and that He will find you there and bear you to the fold upon His shoulder. If your prayer is so weak that you fear the sound of your own audible voice, still do not give up. You may be but a bruised reed. Even so, Christ will not break you. Your spiritual life may be but a smoking flax. Even so, Christ will not quench your weak efforts. You may have no blood or training of which to boast. Still take courage, for the unpedigreed Gentiles find grace and deliverance in Him.

Jesus Christ is a Saviour of unfailing gentleness and mercy; but He is also of unfailing virtue and power. His blood can make the vilest clean. His Spirit can purge the deepest pollution of sin. His power can transform the most unlikely. "O everybody come! Come to the Saviour, come!"

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