

# The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax

by J.C. Philpot

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing one's weakness and dependence on God, and the need to pass through trials and temptations in order to be made strong in the Lord.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 34:18, Psalm 51:17, Isaiah 42:3-4, Isaiah 43:2, Romans 8:37, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Philippians 1:6, Hebrews 13:5, 1 John 1:9

**Topics:** "Christian Suffering", "Gods Mercy"

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## Description

J.C. Philpot preaches about the tender care of Jesus towards the weak and struggling believers, using the imagery of a bruised reed and smoking flax to illustrate the believer's weakness and need for Christ's strength. He emphasizes that the Lord does not break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax but supports and sustains them until victory is achieved through His judgment. Philpot delves into the character of the tried Christian under these similitudes, highlighting the process of being bruised by afflictions, temptations, and guilt, and the struggle of the smoking flax amidst corruptions and doubts. He assures believers that despite their weaknesses and struggles, the Lord's mercy, grace, and faithfulness will ultimately lead them to victory.

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## Transcript

Preached at Eden Street Chapel, on August 10, 1851, by J. C. Philpot.

"A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, until he sends forth judgment unto victory." Matthew 12:20

A child of God in himself is all weakness. Others may boast of their strength; but he has none, and he feels he has none. But it is one thing to subscribe to this truth as a matter of doctrine, and another to be acquainted with it as a matter of inward, personal experience. It must be learned, painfully for the most part, inwardly learned under the teachings of the Spirit. Now it is this weakness, experimentally known and felt, that opens the way for a personal experience of the strength of Christ; for when Paul was groaning under the buffetings of Satan and the festering throbs of the thorn in the flesh, the Lord himself said to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." If, therefore, we know not experimentally what weakness is, we cannot know experimentally what it is to have the strength of Christ made perfect in that weakness.

In our text a tried Christian is set forth under two striking similitudes. He is compared to a "bruised reed;" and "smoking flax."

And of the Lord it is most graciously said, that this "bruised reed" he will not "break," and this "smoking flax" he will not "quench." No more, so far from breaking the one, or quenching the other, he will never leave his gracious work in the soul until he "sends forth judgment unto victory."

In looking, then, at the words this evening, I shall, as far as the Lord may enable-

I. Consider the character of the tried Christian under these two similitudes- "A bruised reed," and "smoking flax."

II. Show that the gracious Redeemer will not "break" the one, nor "quench" the other.

III. Show that he will eventually "send forth judgment unto victory."

I. The character of the tried Christian under these two similitudes- "A bruised reed," and "smoking flax."

1. Can we find a more striking emblem of weakness than a REED? A Christian is not here compared to an oak that spreads its roots deep in the soil, and tosses its sturdy arms abroad into the sky, that stands the brunt of a thousand storms, and outlives revolving centuries. That were an inappropriate emblem of so feeble, so frail a creature as a needy, necessitous sinner. But when the blessed Spirit would use a similitude most strikingly descriptive of a dependant upon grace, of a pauper dependant upon charity, he takes that simple yet familiar figure of a reed. Let us examine the points of resemblance-

1. A reed, though lowly, humble, despicable, unknown, and unnoticed by the eye that rests with admiration on the towering oak or spreading cedar, is yet a partaker of life; and this life is deep down in the root. But the bed in which this root lies, the soil in which and out of which it thrives, spreads, and grows, is not the rich soil of the garden, but the mud and slime of the ditch. Yet, buried as it is in, and overwhelmed beneath this slimy bed, the very region of coldness and death, it is utterly and entirely, in its nature and essence, distinct from it. It is in the ditch, yet not of it; surrounded with its slime, but uncontaminated with its filth; ever in contact with its mire, but clean to the heart's core, and without one particle of mud penetrating into its living tissues.

Such is the life of God in the soul; surrounded with all the mud and mire of nature's corruption, yet not only distinct from it, but uncontaminated by it. Did deadness mortify, did temptation smother, did sin corrupt the pure, holy life of God in the soul- long, long ago would it have dropped limb from limb, like the gangrened body of a leper.

2. But secondly, in its first growth the seed pushes its infant stem, its tender bud, through the mud and mire in which it finds its root into the pure light and genial warmth of day. It does not, like a stone, lie dead and motionless at the bottom of the ditch, but presses onward and upward into a purer, brighter atmosphere. So, in the first teachings of grace, does the infant seed of divine life rear its head above the corruptions by which it is surrounded. And, as the reed seeks the light of day, and though flooded with water, and often buried by it, yet lifts up its infant head to catch the warm vivifying beams of the sun; so the life of God in the soul, though often overborne by the swelling tides of corruption, lifts up its infant head to catch the warm beams of the Sun of righteousness.

What a blessed moment is that when grace first lifts up its head above the slime of corruption and the waters of darkness! when the green shoot is for the first time blown upon by the southern breeze, and basks in the vivifying beams of spring! when after a long struggle with the suffocating mire of sin, and the waves of temptation and guilt, it emerges into day! What a start it then makes in growth, and how it seems when the head is lifted up, to have forgotten the mud and mire in which the root lies, as well as the waves that once beat over its head!

Such is a young Christian, who, after many doubts, fears, temptations, and exercises, is indulged with some manifestations of the Lord's mercy and love! I compare sometimes young Christians to hedge-rows in spring. How verdant they are; how tender every leaf! how full of sap and juice every shoot! how bright and refreshing the hawthorn blossom to the eye! And how, when the rays of the sun play upon the green leaves, they reflect its hues, and shine forth with transparent brightness!

But let a few weeks or months pass; let there be a long season of drought; let the dust of the road settle in thick clouds upon the leaves, ah! what a change! how fallen the flower! how shriveled up, how burnt and dried the branches! Yet is the change more apparent than real; no, a change for the better rather than the worse. The hedge is stronger in autumn than it was in spring. Though it looked then so beautiful, and every leaf and shoot were so tender, there was little strength in it. But rain and storm, and heat and drought, with revolving nights and days, have produced an effect.

When winter comes, the wood is ripened; and though the leaves are burnt and shriveled, yet the hedge-row is all the stronger for having experienced the midday heat and the midnight cold, the summer sun and the autumn frost. So with the Christian. When he has lived some years, gone through some storms, been dusted over by the world, got burnt and blackened, like the bride Song 1:6, by the sun of temptation, and been chilled by the cold of desertion, he is ripened and matured. What he has lost in loveliness he has gained in strength; and though the wintry blast may howl through his branches, it does not break them off, nor freeze them up as it would the immature juicy roots of spring. Yes, after all, there is a strength in him, and a ripening, which the young wood has not.

But to revert to our figure. Hitherto we have traced the progress of our "reed," from the struggling of the germ beneath the mud until the tender shoot emerges from the water. Having reached the region of light, warmth, and air, it makes rapid progress. Every ray of the sun draws it up day by day into more vigorous growth.

But a change takes place. The text speaks of a "BRUISED reed;" and the reed we have been considering is not yet bruised. Nothing yet has taken place to bruise or crush it. The mud, it is true, seemed to impede its progress, the depth of the water prevented its emerging easily, and its infant head had sometimes to buffet with the wave. But it grew up thus far without serious injury. But now bruising comes. A Christian, then, must pass through a certain experience in order to bring him into the position spoken of in the text, and make him the character there intimated, "a bruised reed." For what is a bruised reed? It is not a broken reed; the head does not fall off, nor does it sink under the water and die. But it is bruised.

Whence arises this experience? What makes a Christian "a bruised reed?" Several things-

1. The holy LAW of God. It is true, that usually the law is applied to the conscience in the very first convictions of sin. But it is not always so, or at least not with the same power. When did Paul learn the experience contained in Romans 7:9-11? Was it during the three days at Damascus, or afterwards in the deserts of Arabia? Ga 1:17 It would seem that his distress of soul at Damascus arose chiefly from his

having kicked against the goads of conscience in persecuting the saints. Stephen's murder lay heavy on his soul. But in Arabia "the commandment came, and he died;" and in those gloomy deserts, "sin taking occasion by the law wrought in him all kinds of forbidden desires." There the law bruised him. It bruised the holy Lamb of God; and, by bruising the reed, bruises it into conformity to the suffering Man of Sorrows in the garden and on the cross.

2. But AFFLICTION also bruises. Let a Christian pass through much trouble in mind, family, body or circumstances; let him in that trouble be denied the sweet presence of God; let trial upon trial beat on his head, like wave after wave on the ocean shore. It will bruise him. He will not have the strength of mind or body, the light step, the cheerful countenance, the buoyant spirit that he had before. Though it does not break him utterly, nor crush him into despair, yet it bruises his spirit. And this is the purpose of God in sending affliction. He means to bruise him thereby.

His own dear Son was bruised by grief and trouble, for he was a "Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief." Grief and he were not strangers; they were intimate acquaintances; and by grief was he bruised, so as to be "a worm, and no man." This indeed was "the affliction of the afflicted" Psalm 22:24. Grief broke his heart, bruised him into obedience and resignation to the will of God; for "though he was a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things that he suffered." If, then, we are to have fellowship with the Son of God in his sorrows, we must have our measure of the same afflictions, that we may have some sympathy with the broken-hearted Lord. Without this we can have neither union nor communion with Him; for, as Deer says,

Union can be none

Between a heart as soft as wax,

And hearts as hard as stone:

Between a head diffusing blood,

And members sound and whole;

Between an agonizing God, And an unfeeling soul.

We perhaps sometimes long after closer union and communion with the Lord Jesus Christ, lament our distance from him, and the alienation of our affections toward him. But do we ever think of the way whereby we are to be brought near- that affliction is the appointed path? That to enter into union and communion with a broken-hearted Lord, we also must have broken hearts; that to be brought into intimate relationship and acquaintance with the Man of Sorrows, we too must have sorrows? We dare not, we must not pray for affliction; that were too venturesome a prayer; but if we pray for union with the Lord Jesus Christ, we are indirectly praying for it. I would counsel no man to pray for affliction. Young Christians have done so until the answer has made them tremble. But if we pray for union with the Lord Jesus Christ, we are really praying for a path of tribulation.

3. But TEMPTATION also sadly bruises the "reed." There are few things that bruise it more. But why should the "reed" be thus bruised? Why should powerful and painful temptations fall upon it to crush it? Because unbruised, it is too strong. It needs to be taught, sensibly taught, its weakness; and there is nothing, I believe, which makes us feel that weakness so much as an acquaintance with temptation. Temptation brings to light the evils of the heart. These are, for the most part, unnoticed and unknown until

temptation discovers them. David's adulterous, murderous heart, Hezekiah's pride, Job's peevishness, Jonah's rebellion, Peter's cowardice, all lay hidden and concealed in their bosoms until temptation drew them forth. Temptation did not put them there, but found them there.

Our nature is the fuel to which temptation is the fire. But the shavings lie harmless enough in the grate until the lucifer match touches them. It is this ready-laid fuel that makes temptation so dangerous. Well therefore is the prayer and the precept, "Lead us not into temptation; Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation." Were there in us no sin, we would be like Jesus, when he said, "The Prince of this world comes, and has nothing in me." But he has everything in us; and therefore when temptation is presented by him, it sets the carnal mind all on fire. This grieves and distresses the new man of grace, bruises the tender heart, and chafes and galls the conscience.

But these temptations also bruise our own strength, wisdom and righteousness. Did not Job come out of his temptations with his self-righteousness bruised? And what but this mallet crushed David's pride, Hezekiah's ostentation, Jonah's rebellion, and Peter's strength?

But when the reed is bruised, it impedes the flow of sap. So under temptation and the guilt that it produces, there is less flowing into the soul of the sensible presence and grace of God. And this makes temptation doubly trying.

4. But SATAN, especially, is permitted in God's wonderful providence to bruise the "reed." It was declared in the first promise, that "the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head;" but it was added, that "the serpent should bruise his heel." The very part that trod upon him the serpent was allowed to bruise. And if he was allowed to bruise "the seed of the woman," much more, much more may he bruise us. And bruise us he will to some purpose. How the apostle Paul had a painful experience of this! Satan, we read, buffeted him 2Co 12:7. The word "buffet" means to beat with the fist. Satan's assaults are knock-down blows, not gentle taps. He strikes with the strength and skill of the professional boxer; his blows therefore stun. Sometimes, for instance, he strikes us with an infidel suggestion. How this stuns and confuses the mind! Sometimes with a blasphemous insinuation. How this bruises the tender conscience! Sometimes with enmity, rebellion, or despair. How these wound and distress the feelings! But by these and similar temptations two effects are produced-

1. Pride, strength, and self-righteousness are more or less crushed.

2. The heart is bruised and made tender. Thus, as in the smitten reed, the outer coat and the inner pith are bruised by the same blow, so in the exercised believer, the outer life and the inner life, the outward peel of creature religion and the inward heart of vital godliness, are bruised by the same trials and temptations.

5. But Sin, too- I mean the guilt of it, when laid on the conscience- sadly bruises. You get entangled perhaps in a snare, you are overtaken by some stratagem of Satan, or some besetment from within. And what is the consequence? Guilt lies hard and heavy upon your conscience. This bruises it, makes it tender and sore, often cuts deeply into it until it bleeds at well-near every pore.

6. God, also, not only indirectly and permissively through Satan and temptation, but directly and immediately bruises the reed. "Your hand," cries the Psalmist, "presses me severely." "Day and night your hand was heavy upon me." "Remove your stroke from me, I am consumed by the blow of your hand." We read, also, of Christ, that "it pleased the Lord to bruise him." And as he bruises the Head, so he bruises the members. By his reproofs, his frowns, his awesome majesty, his unspeakable holiness, he bruises

them into contrition before him.

Here, then, is the "bruised reed," drooping its head over the water, ready to sink beneath the wave, and fall down into its native corruption there to die. Is this bruised, tottering, trembling thing the emblem of a Christian? blown by the wind, washed by the wave, hanging over the stream only by the skin, sometimes in and sometimes out as the gust swells or sinks? Who would think that this was a Christian? Who would credit that this was the way to prove experimentally the love and power of the Savior? Who would suppose, until taught of God, that this is the way to get at right religion, true religion, an experimental knowledge of the work of God upon the soul, an experimental acquaintance with the Man of Sorrows, inward union and communion with the Lord of life and glory?

If we were called upon to choose a path, this is the last we would think of. Our view would be this--every day to get better and better, holier and holier, more and more spiritual, and thus by degrees grow up into a deeper and closer knowledge of Jesus Christ. But God has not appointed such a way. His way is to make "strength perfect in weakness," and therefore he makes a Christian feel himself "a bruised reed," that in him his mighty power may be made known.

2. But the blessed Spirit, speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ and his work, compares a tried Christian also to the "smoking flax." The word "flax" here rather means what we call tow, that is, the refuse of the hemp, or of the flax. This refuse it seems to have been the custom to set on fire; and, as there was much dirt and filth in it, the flame burnt in a very smouldering manner. This smoking flax is the figure, then, that the Holy Spirit has employed to set forth the life and work in a Christian's bosom. What is this "flax?" Is it not the filth and corruptions of our evil nature, the refuse, the scum, as it were, of the Adam fall? And what is the fire that makes the smoke? Is it not the life of God within- that fire which is kindled by a live coal from off the altar?

A Christian, then, is spoken of, not as breathing forth into a bright and shining flame; but "as smoking flax," just so much of the life of God in the soul as to make a smoke without much flame or heat. Many, many of God's children are here- feeling, deeply feeling their corruptions, and yet burning in the midst of their heart, a fire, a blessed fire of God's own kindling. They would, if they could, burst forth into a holy flame; they would not have their eyes so continually annoyed with the smoke of their own corruptions; they would flame up unto God in the sweet breakings forth of faith, hope, and love. But their corruptions and unbelief, their sin and shame, all seem to press down the life of God in the soul. As in the smoking flax, the filth and refuse so choke the fire that it smokes and smoulders, but cannot break forth into a lively flame, so the filth and folly of our corrupt nature seem to stifle the holy flame of grace in the soul.

What heaps of rubbish overspread the inward life of God! You whose souls are exercised, do not you find how family cares, occupation in business, crowds of foolish and worldly thoughts, sinful and sensual desires, and a whole dust-bin of vain, idle imaginations, all suffocate the flame that is struggling upwards. Thus days and weeks are spent in a 'dying life', and a 'living death'. The fire neither goes out, nor burns up. Sometimes the smoke rises up thicker and higher; sometimes it dies away so as scarcely to be seen--and sometimes a passing breeze wafts it up into a transient flame. But its general character is to smoulder.

Where there is this in the soul, there is life. There is a struggle now against corruption, as the fire in the midst of the smoking flax struggles against the refuse by which it is surrounded; but, alas! it needs a vigorous breath to make it brightly glow; it needs the south wind from the mountains of spices to burn

through the overlying mass of corruption, and mount up like the flame in which the angel of the Lord ascended when Manoah and his wife looked on. But there is life, where there is even smoke. Where it merely moulders and smoulders, there is fire. It is not merely a heap of dead refuse; there is a holy fire beneath that causes the flax to smoke.

Such is very much the experience of the day. Things are low for the most part in Zion. Take almost any Christian, and you will find that he is at best but a "smoking flax;" and especially perhaps in London. I do believe in my very conscience there is more real religion in the country than in London- more feeling in the heart, more life in the soul. The people are less cumbered with worldly anxieties, and less overborne by the broad, deep, rapid stream of carnality. But Zion, generally, in town or country, is in a low place; the flax is smoking, and that is all. There is enough fire to show that the life of God is within, and yet not enough to break forth into a glowing flame.

II. But we pass on to consider how the blessed Redeemer "will not break" the "bruised reed;" nor "quench" the "smoking flax." "He knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust." Here, then, is a "BRUISED REED," a poor child of God, ready to give up all hope, to sink beneath the wave no more to rise, expecting that the next blow will sever the stem, or suffocate and bury him in his native mire and mud.

But O how graciously, how tenderly and gently does the Redeemer deal with this timid, tried member of his mystical body! He deals with him neither according to his merits nor his fears. The "bruised reed" deserves to be broken again and again; and it fears it because it deserves it. But the gracious, tender-hearted Redeemer, so far from breaking gently binds. And how he can in a moment bind up the "bruised reed!" By one word, one look, one touch, one smile, he can in a moment raise up the drooping head. This is his blessed office. The disciples would have broken the bruised Syrophenician woman, when they said, "Send her away, for she cries after us." But not so their heavenly Master. He dealt not so with her. His holiness, his purity, his hatred of sin, his zeal for the glory of his Father, would indeed all lead him to break- but his mercy, grace, compassion, and love, all lead him to bind.

You may perhaps feel yourself a poor "bruised reed"- bruised by afflictions, by temptations, by guilt, by Satan, ready to perish, to give up all hope, and droop away and die. O remember- may the Lord give us ever to remember- that this blessed Man of Sorrows "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." "Being touched with the feeling of our infirmities," he can sympathize and support, and therefore will never, no, never break a "bruised reed." If our poor soul is bruised by affliction, by temptation, by doubt and fear, by Satan's suggestions, be it known for our comfort and encouragement, that the condescending and tender-hearted Redeemer will never, no, never break that "bruised reed," but will most graciously, in his own time and way, bind it up.

"The SMOKING FLAX," it is said also of Him, that "he will not quench." O what does the "smoking flax" not deserve! Does it not merit that the foot of God should stamp it out? When you think for a moment how filthy and abominable your corruptions are; how strong and powerful your lusts and passions; how many and grievous your slips and falls; how carnal your mind; how cold and lifeless too often your frame; how wandering your prayers; how worldly your inclinations; how earthly and sensual your desires- is it not sometimes a wonder to you, that the Almighty God does not in righteous wrath put his foot upon you and crush you into hell, as we crush a spider?

We deserve it every day that we live. I might almost say, that with well-near every breath that we draw we deserve, deeply deserve, to be stamped out of life, and crushed into a never-ending hell. But herein is

manifested the tender condescending mercy and grace of the compassionate Redeemer, that "he will not quench the smoking flax," but will keep the flame alive which he himself so mercifully in the first instance kindled. The hand that brought the spark must keep alive the flame; for as no man can quicken, so no man can keep alive his own soul.

How it is kept alive is indeed most mysterious; but kept alive it is. Does it not sometimes seem to you as though you had no life of God in your soul, not a spark of grace in your heart? Where is your religion? where is your faith and hope and love? Where your spirituality and tenderness of heart, conscience, and affections? where your breathings after God? Gone, gone, gone! And gone all would be utterly, irrecoverably, if it were in your own hands, and consigned to your own keeping. But it is in better hands and better keeping than yours, "Because I live, you shall live also." "He who believes on me has everlasting life, and shall never come into condemnation but is passed from death unto life." "My sheep shall never perish, and none shall pluck them out of my hand." Christ is our life; it is hid with him in God.

And thus it comes to pass, that the "smoking flax" is never quenched. O how quickly would Satan throw water upon it! He would soon, if permitted, pour forth the flood of his temptations, as he is said to do against the church in the wilderness Re 12:15, to extinguish the holy flame that smoulders within. How sin, also, again and again pours forth a whole flood of corruption to overcome and extinguish the life of God in the soul! The world, also, without, and the worse world within, would soon drown it in his destruction and perdition, were the Lord to keep back his protecting hand. But he revives his own work.

Have you not wondered sometimes that when you have been so cold, dead, stupid, hardened, as if you had not one spark of true religion or one grain of real grace, yet all of a sudden you have found your heart softened, melted, moved, stirred, watered, and blessed, and you have felt an inward persuasion that in spite of all your corruptions and sins and sorrows there is the life of God within. It is thus that the blessed Lord keeps alive the holy flame which he himself has kindled. It would soon else go out; no, it must go out, unless he keeps it alive.

The very dust and dirt of the tow would suffocate it, unless he again and again stirred it up and kept it smouldering in the soul. The very words, that "he will not quench it," connected with what is afterwards said, show that he will one day make it burst forth, for he keeps it smouldering on until it flames out. And when it bursts forth into a holy flame, it burns up the corruptions, devours them, swallows them up, and suffers not one to live.

Let the Lord sweetly bless the soul; let the holy flame of his love and grace burn in the heart; this flame, like the fire that fell down from heaven in the days of Elijah, licks up all the waters in the trench, and consumes, while it lasts, the filth and corruption whereby it was surrounded. But alas, alas! it soon gathers again. The cares of business, the things of time and sense, an evil heart, a defiled imagination, soon gather together the dust and refuse; and then it has to go on smoking and smouldering as before. It cannot, no, it cannot of itself break forth into a holy flame. But it will one day burn brightly in a blessed eternity, when there shall be no refuse of sin and corruption to stifle the ever-mounting flame of praise, adoration, and love.

III. But we pass on to our third and last point- What the Lord will eventually do, and what he will never desist from, until he is completely done. This last clause seems to cast a gleam of light upon the whole of the preceding, "Until he sends forth judgment unto victory." While the reed is being "bruised," and while the flax is "dimly burning" as we read in the margin, or smouldering, "judgment" is going on; that is, the

court of judgment is set up in the conscience, and verdicts are passing against the soul.

Wherever there is the life of God within, there will be a bar at which and before which the soul will be arraigned- the bar of a tender CONSCIENCE. God's Viceregent, the blessed Spirit, sits there, and with the word of God in his hands and its spiritual application in his lips, he summons the soul to stand before him.

Do you not find something of this going on daily? You speak a word amiss; does not the Viceregent bring you to the bar, and condemn you for it? There is a rising up or breaking forth of unseemly temper. The father or the mother, the master or the mistress, gives vent to some sudden violent outburst of anger, mastered, overmastered by the impetuosity of natural temper. Does the Viceregent of God pass this by, and take no notice? He brings up the delinquent, summons him to the bar, condemns him. Or there may be a word spoken in business which is not the strict truth. You would not, you cannot, must not tell a lie; but still there is something not very, not very unlike lying. There are these goods to be recommended, or this customer not to be turned away; and by some little delicate maneuvering the whole affair is managed very nicely, as a Regent Street tradesman would say. No 'outright lie' has been told, but a little 'equivocation' has been practiced. Ah! where is conscience? The Viceregent has seen all, marked all, and now brings the criminal to feel and confess all.

Or the eye has been wandering and lusting after some evil thing, or, not to particularize too minutely, in some way or other sin and temptation have got the better of you. Is God's Viceregent silent? Does Mr. Recorder, as Bunyan calls him, keep silence? No; he speaks, and loudly too; and when he speaks, all the city trembles. During this time as the reed is bruised with these exercises, and the flax smoulders amid these temptations, judgment is going on, condemnation is felt; there is guilt of conscience, a writing of bitter things against one's self, with a whole host of doubts and fears for, as Deer most truly says, "Sin engenders doubt."

It is our slipping and being overcome by temptation which opens a way for a whole army of doubts and fears to push in through the breach. Were the sentry duly on guard, were the soldiers on the battlements pointing their artillery heavenwards, and, above all, were the great Captain of their salvation at their head, no enemy would dare to attack. But when the sentry is asleep, the artillery silenced, the Captain gone, and a breach made, a whole troop pours in from the black camp to storm and plunder the city.

But, to revert to the figure of our text- O how tenderly is the blessed Lord watching all this time! Here is a "bruised reed," bruised by the law, sin, Satan, sorrow, and temptation; without strength, ready to sink and die. Jesus does not, as he might justly do, crush it with a blast of his dreadful displeasure. Again- Here is a "smoking flax" who deserves a thousand times a day to be stamped under foot. But the gracious Man of Sorrows "will never break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax." It is true, that "he sends forth judgment," for he means to bring the soul down into the dust; but while this judgment is going on, he secretly supports; for he kills that he may make alive; he brings down to the grave that he may bring up. But in sending forth this "judgment," it is "unto victory." Conquest is at the end; victory is sure. There may be a long conflict; a hard and fearful battle, with the garments rolled in sweat and blood; but victory is sure at last. For he will never rest until he fully gains the day.

O how Satan would triumph if any saint ever fell out of the embraces of the good Shepherd; if he could point his derisive finger up to heaven's gate and to its risen King, and say, 'Your blood was shed in vain for this wretch; he is mine, he is mine!' Such a boast would fill hell with a yell of triumph. But no, no; it never will be so; the "blood that cleanses from all sin" never was, never can be shed in vain. Though the reed is

"bruised," it will never be broken; though the flax "smokes," it will never be extinguished; for He that "sends forth judgment" sends it "unto victory."

Long indeed may the battle fluctuate; again and again may the enemy charge; again and again may the event seem doubtful. Victory may be delayed even unto a late hour, until evening is drawing on, and the shades of night are about to fall; but it is sure at last. And it is the Lord that does the whole. We have no power to turn the battle to the gate. Is there one temptation that you can master? Is there any one sin that you can, without divine help, crucify? Is there one lust that you can, without special grace, subdue? We are total weakness in this matter. But the blessed Lord makes his strength perfect in this weakness. We may and indeed must be bruised, and under painful feelings may think no one was so hardly dealt with, and that our case is singular. But without this we would not judge ourselves; and "if we judge ourselves, we shall not be judged of the Lord." If you justify yourself, the Lord will condemn you; if you condemn yourself, the Lord will justify you. Exalt yourself, and the Lord will humble you; humble yourself, and the Lord will exalt you.

This ought to encourage every one that feels bruised in spirit, and to smoke and smoulder. I do not mean to say, I can give the encouragement; I am not the man to say that either I can give, or that you can take it. But if you are the character here pointed out, all your questionings of what the Lord has done, or what he will do, does not alter the case. Questionings do not make Jesus, not to be Jesus; they do not make the word of God, not to be the word of the most High. "If we believe not, he abides faithful; he cannot deny himself."

You, as a "bruised reed," may write a thousand bitter things against yourself; you, as a "smoking flax," may fear there is no life of God in your soul. But Jesus, if he has made you a "bruised reed," or "smoking flax," will carry on his own work; for we read, in connection with the very passage in the prophet Isaiah, "He shall not fail, nor be discouraged, until he has set judgment in the earth; and the isles shall wait for his law" Isaiah 42:4. The words are remarkable. They show that he has, so to speak, amazing difficulties to encounter. But he will not fail in what he has undertaken; he will not be discouraged by all the opposition he may meet with, until he has accomplished his holy purpose. For it is "his own right arm which has gotten him the victory." Ever bear in mind, that as the Lord said of old, "I do not do this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for my holy name's sake;" so it is not for your sake- base, poor, and vile sinners- but for his own name's sake, truth's sake, word's sake, and eternal honor and glory's sake, that he "sends forth judgment unto victory!"

What a mercy it is that the fulfillment of the Lord's promise depends upon his own veracity; that it does not depend upon our feelings; no, nor upon our experience, but upon his own veracity- "Has he said, and will he not do it?" And therefore here is ground for hope and faith, not in ourselves who are always poor, weak, miserable creatures- but in the Lord's mercy, goodness, and truth. The foundation of our trust is in the character of the Son of God, that he is what he is- a blessed Jesus, able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him. He who puts his trust in Him will never be confounded; he that hopes through grace in his mercy, will never be put to shame; and he that believes in Him will surely reap the end of his faith, even the salvation of his soul.

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