

# Set on Things Above

by John McGregor

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*This sermon focuses on three key aspects of Jesus' character as seen in Matthew 12:20: 1. Jesus as the 'battered reed' who does not break off, symbolizing His endurance and strength in carrying our sins on the cross. 2. Jesus as the 'smoldering wick' He does not put out, representing His ability to reignite our passion and faith when it seems dim. 3. Jesus as the one who leads 'justice to victory,' offering hope and victory over injustices and wounds in our lives.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 42:3, John 6:37, Galatians 2:20

**Topics:** "Endurance in Christ", "Restoration of Faith"

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## Description

This sermon focuses on three key aspects of Jesus' character as seen in Matthew 12:20: 1. Jesus as the 'battered reed' who does not break off, symbolizing His endurance and strength in carrying our sins on the cross. 2. Jesus as the 'smoldering wick' He does not put out, representing His ability to reignite our passion and faith when it seems dim. 3. Jesus as the one who leads 'justice to victory,' offering hope and victory over injustices and wounds in our lives.

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## Transcript

Thank you, Pastor Henry, and good morning. It's been a wonderful weekend, and it's a joy to be back in southern Ontario. The congregation Pastor Henry was talking about this morning, one of our young men, will be preaching.

We have, I think, five preachers in the congregation, so that's kind of nice. It means the old guy can disappear from time to time, and things go along quite well. Excuse me.

I want this morning just to continue the theme of encouragement, and I'm looking in the Gospel of Matthew. In chapter 12, and I'm just going to read verses 18, 19, and 20. Excuse me.

Matthew chapter 12, 18, 19, and 20. 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 proclaim justice to the Gentiles.

He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. A battered reed he will not break off, and a smoldering wick he will not put out. Until he leads justice to victory.

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for all of your kindness to us. We thank you especially for the gift of your word. And as we come to open it this morning, we pray that you would indeed encourage our hearts.

Thank you for each of these, your children, who have come together to worship you. Lord, we're so grateful that you are here in the midst. And that you have promised, as we gather, you will be there to speak to our hearts.

So as we surrender this time to you, Lord, be pleased to take it, and to breathe the word of God into our very souls. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Well, it says in the bulletin, title in the English service, and it's blank. And you could write in three pictures of Jesus. And it says text, and it's blank.

And you can now write in Matthew 12, verse 20. And I want just to think about just this one verse. For our moments together this morning.

As you think about the Christian life, there are times of great zeal. And you can hardly contain yourself as God is working and moving and doing special things in your heart and in your life. And there's a sort of vim and a vigor to it.

And then there are also times where it's a little quieter. And sometimes times where things can even get a bit dry. And times when we might be struggling with something or some overwhelming circumstance seems to come along.

And those are times often where you hear the voice of the evil one say, you see, God doesn't really care about you. Or you hear, you see, you're not really what you should be. And there's all those accusations.

And you think about the voice of the Holy Spirit is often the voice that convicts us. And conviction allows us to come in repentance and to know again a touch of God. The voice of the evil one is always the voice of condemnation.

A voice that leaves no way, no place to go. No sense of finding relief. And I'm so grateful to God that He's given to us in His Word many glimpses of exactly how He works and His heart toward you and toward me.

And so as we think this morning for our few moments just on verse 20 here, we see that the Savior is actually quoting and thinking about Isaiah 42 verses 3 and 4. And that's this text speaking about the Lord's servant. And it's speaking in fact about Jesus Himself. And it tells us three things in verse 20 that I want to just spend some moments on and to think about to encourage our hearts.

And this verse just breaks into three statements, doesn't it? A battered reed He will not break off. And it's true of Jesus. He was certainly that battered reed in life and on the cross.

But although He was battered, He was not broken off. The Scriptures tell us not one of His bones was broken. You recall in Psalm 22, it speaks about that as well.

And you see, it's a picture of Jesus, isn't it? He took all of the punishment for your sin and for mine and carried it all upon Him. And He is the one who accomplished that work. That's why in John's Gospel, we read those wonderful words.

It is finished. He didn't fail to finish the work. It is completed.

And I love those words. I like them even better in Greek. It means paid in full.

Complete. Done. Same kind of thing that you get on the bill when you pay it.

And it's cleared. And that's exactly the work that Jesus did on the cross as He took upon Him our sin. And it is also a perfect picture of the believer's life as we think about who are we supposed to be like.

We are to become more and more like Jesus. And here is this just tremendously encouraging thought. He will not break the bruised or the battered.

Jesus bruised for you and I and He knows what it feels like. He knows all of the feelings of our infirmities. The Scriptures tell us.

You cannot go to Jesus with something that has happened that has hurt you, that has grieved you, that has broken you. And He is going to say, wow, never heard of that before. He knows.

He understands all of the feelings of our infirmities. And how wonderful that is to know that the Savior fully understands. And you think about a little reed sort of bruised over, bent over.

And it seems so fragile, so useless, so small, so little. And it seems sometimes that that thing just hangs there almost by a thread. And it would be so easy for it to break off.

Bent, but not broken. And friends, sin certainly has bent us, hasn't it? Life hurts us. Anybody in here this morning who hasn't experienced at least one hurt in life? I don't see any hands up anywhere.

That seems to be the human experience, doesn't it? We all know and understand that life can hurt at times, can't it? And here, as we look at this first picture of Jesus, the battered reed, He will not break off. Notice just the fact that He's not in the business of breaking off and casting away. The world might look at you and me and say, Oh, well, there's not much power there, there's not much strength there.

Let's just pull that off and remove that and dump that and let that go. That's not really of any value. But that text says the Lord does not do that.

And I am so grateful because it refutes all those lies that the devil throws out about how inconsequential one human life is. But your life in the hands of Christ today, despite all that the world can throw at you, He is so strong and so able. He's not going to cast you or I to the side.

In fact, He is going to bring healing and help to us instead. Let me take, just keep your finger there in Matthew 12 and 20, and let me take us over to Luke's Gospel for a moment to the 13th chapter. And let me give you a biblical illustration of this, if we could, from verses 10 through 17 of Luke 13.

And Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And there was a woman who for 18 years had had a sickness caused by a spirit. And she was bent double and could not straighten up at all.

When Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, Woman, you are freed from your sickness. And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made erect again and began glorifying God. But the synagogue official, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, began saying to the crowd in response, There are six days in which work should be done, so come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day.

But the Lord answered him and said, You hypocrites, does not each one of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead him away to water? And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as

she is, whom Satan has bound for 18 long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day. And as He said this, all His opponents were being humiliated and the entire crowd was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Him. Now here's a wonderful incident where the Lord Jesus takes the service.

And here is a picture of this thought that a bruised or battered reed He will not break off. Think with me for a moment or two about the service that day. There were perhaps important people who came.

Maybe the mayor of the city was in the service that day. Maybe some of the local officials, people of authority and rank were in the service that day. You could picture, you know, as somebody special comes in and somebody says, Oh, look, we are so delighted that you have come to join today.

Come on up here. Here's a special seat for you. Great to have you here and so on.

And then in comes this lady and she kind of goes about like this. And people would maybe tend to say, Ah, it's just her. You see, isn't it interesting? That day, Jesus in that service looked just at her.

And am I talking to someone this morning? And there's a little bending in your heart. There's a little loneliness in your spirit. There's a little sense of aloneness in your being.

And life is pressing upon you. Could I say to you this morning that very same Lord Jesus is looking just at you. And just as He looked that day at that woman, He knew exactly what her need was.

And you know, we can picture this in our imagination, can't we? This little lady and so on. But do you ever stop to think that this woman is you and me? She is a picture of you and me. In fact, this little text is wonderfully the whole of the Gospel in seven short verses there in Luke 13.

Because if you read that story, you see that that woman was not always like that. It says that she had been like that for eighteen years. She had been bent over and it tells us that it was a work of Satan.

And as you think upon this, think about the human race. They were created in the image of God. Walking before the Lord.

With Him in that garden. But along came sin. Disobedience.

And then there came that separation. Then there came that bending. No longer straight.

No longer looking in the face of God. And you know, when I think about this lady, I think about so many things that rush through my mind and my heart. If you're bent right over like this, well, you know, you can really only see the ground and your feet.

That's what sin does to us. All we can see is the things of this earth and ourselves. Eighteen years the devil held this lady captive.

And I'm sure many people had discounted her completely. Just a bruised reed. Just an unimportant individual who showed up there in the service week after week after week because Jesus says she's a daughter of Abraham.

And don't you love it as you think and as you notice the whole of the Gospel here? It's Jesus who is looking for her just as it is Jesus who is looking for you and me today. It is Jesus who comes into that

place where she is. It is Jesus who looks at her and says, come.

Come to me. He calls her. And I love that sense, don't you? Of how the Lord calls.

It's so personal. And it's so wonderful. And you know it is so individual.

It is essentially for her that day that He is reaching out and saying, come. Now, you know, she must have felt, hmm, if I come, everybody's going to see me. Everybody's going to know.

I'm just going to, hmm. And again, you see the truth of the Gospel. A decision has to be made.

A decision to go and to answer Christ's call and to come to Him regardless of what others might think, regardless of what the circumstances might be, regardless of who might say something. Not everybody was pleased that day. You know, you hear the leader of the synagogue say, hey, there's six days you can come and be healed.

Don't do it on the Sabbath. But Jesus defends her, doesn't He? And there again is a continuing lesson of the Gospel, my dear friends. This little reed, you and I, blowing in the breeze, maybe not so significant to the world, the Lord doesn't break us off, doesn't cast us away.

He becomes our defense. When all that criticism came toward her, He is the one who responds. Not her.

Now, you'll have to forgive me if you've got a heart condition or something. Just stick your fingers in your ears for 30 seconds, okay? Because I think about that and it makes me go, woo-hoo! See, Wilma, I don't just do it in Regina. Think about that whole picture that is given to us.

Isn't it an exact picture of what Jesus is talking about using the words of Isaiah? A bruised reed. That's exactly what she was. But the Savior, as He steps in, oh, what a change there is.

And I imagine that woman must have walked out of there that day up straight. And do you think she kind of walked out saying, oh well, another dull church service. I don't think so.

I think she walked out so full that everybody must have looked and said, what in the world happened to you? And she could say, oh, it was nothing in the world. It was the Creator of the world. He knew how to fix my problem.

He knew how to break the bondage that I was in. He knew how to set me free. He knew how to lift me so that I wasn't looking at the earth and myself anymore.

He knew what it is that I really needed. And He still knows what you need today. She had to take that step and come to that place before Him.

He knew her need and she is there in obedience to His call. And everything changes. In that moment of turning away from the things of Satan and self and the world, there comes freedom.

Our world is spending millions of dollars every year trying to bring freedom to places. And really all that we need to bring is Jesus. And He is the great freedom giver.

A bruised reed, He will not break. You heard me say over the last few days about sometimes working with the Billy Graham team. You know, my first assignment for Billy Graham in Canada was I was asked to go into the city of Edmonton and meet with a local pastor and a lady who had called in on one of the

television shows where Billy had been preaching.

And the lady was a prostitute. She had a terrible, terrible life. And this pastor and I, we met her in a local restaurant, coffee shop.

She had puncture marks all over her neck and her arms. And perhaps many other places on her body. And she sat there across the table and told us a little bit about the awfulness of her life.

And she said, I watched the television this one night. And he said, if you're watching by television, just pray with me now. And she said, I did that.

Can you help me because I don't know what's going on? Something's different. I feel so different. I feel clean.

And I need some help. And I helped her get tied in with the church that the pastor belonged to. And about three months later, I called and I asked, how's Susan doing? And he said, John, every church should have somebody like Susan.

Our believers who've been quiet and steady for years and haven't moved and haven't done a lot for the Lord, she comes in and she opens up her Bible and she says to them, what does this mean? Or she'll come along and say, I'm going to walk through the mall and give out stuff for Jesus. Want to come? Want to come? He said, John, every church should have somebody like this woman. She was so full of the Spirit of God.

But you know, today, she's the Sunday school superintendent in that church. Today, she's the mother of four wonderful kids. Today, nobody would ever know what the background looked like.

Because when Jesus comes, that little bruised reed is not broken, but healed. I wonder this morning, am I speaking to someone and the Spirit of God is connecting with your heart? Oh, how I long to have that kind of touch from God. My background, I'm sure if people knew what I was, they wouldn't want anything to do with me.

I've had people tell me right to my face sometimes, I'd come to the meetings if you hadn't been a terrorist. I got no time for terrorists. And I say, I don't either.

My wife says, no, he's not a terrorist, just a holy terror. So there's the first picture that we get of Jesus in this text. And what a wonderful picture it is.

But I thank God that it doesn't finish there. There's more and it's so good. A smoldering wick He will not put out.

And you know, there are times, are there not, where the fire seems to almost go out. And you know, when the fire's going out, there's just smoke. A smoldering wick He will not extinguish or put out.

Sometimes it seems that the flame is gone and all that remains is just a little smoke. I always run into people on my travels who say, I used to do this for Jesus. I used to do that for Jesus.

I used to do all these things. And I say, what happened? And you know, if you put all of those answers together, you'd come up with this statement. The fire is almost out.

And when there's smoke, we think of corruption. There's no light in it. There's no heat in it.

There's just darkness there. And it billows and so on. And these are times, are there not, where the devil tells us lies about ourselves and about others.

And sometimes these are times where we get hurt by someone. And we pick up an offense about something. It just grows beyond proportion.

Have you ever noticed that? You can start out with the smallest thing. He didn't look right at me this morning. And by the time you get to the evening, he's so mad at me, he's never going to talk to me again.

Just think about that. Is that really what happened? No, he was probably heading home thinking, oh man, I've got chores to do. Had no intention there to hurt anybody at all.

But it grows within us. And we listen to the lies of the devil. And they divide and they push apart.

And they wound and they separate. And so on. A smoking wick he will not extinguish.

He'll not put it out. And we read in John 6.37, the one that comes to me, I will never, never, never, never cast him out. Man, what a verse that is.

So as you think about this, if the Lord is not going to snuff it out, what's He going to do, church? If the Lord's not going to take that little smoking bit that's left in your heart and snuff it out, what is He going to do? Well, I grew up in Ireland and fire, it was a common thing in those days because in one room of the house, that's what you had. The fire. And so when it came time to go to bed, you'd stand and warm yourself at the fire.

And then you'd run as fast as you could and put your jammies on. Get in under the blankets as quick as you could and shiver until you went to sleep. You know when the fire would get down a bit, sometimes you'd have to get down on your knees and go... and it would flame up again.

Maybe you've done that at a campfire. If you like campfires like me, you're out of breath by the time you get it going. You ever sing that hymn, Breathe on Me, Breath of God? Isn't that a picture of this? Where Jesus just comes and the closeness returns and as He puts His arms around you, He just says, let me breathe on that smoldering wick.

And sometimes people say to me, it's been so long, I could never really get it back together with the Lord like it was at the very beginning. Oh yeah? Have you read the book of Ezekiel lately? There's a valley of dry bones. And God says to him, Ezekiel, can these bones live? Oh Lord, you know, He says.

And then He says this, preach to the dry bones. What happens? It ends up a mighty army. But only after the breath of God comes and fills those bodies.

Oh friends, you see this picture? A smoldering wick. Jesus won't stuff that out. He won't extinguish it.

And you think about how our human pride so often gets in the way. Well, if I really say what's going on, the people in church are going to know, everybody's going to back away from me and so on. We are so controlled by human opinion.

And we need to be so freed from it. That moment of repentance of just coming to Christ to say, Lord, I'm smoking, but I should be burning. Light the fire again.

Friend, is that what's in your heart this morning? A burning fire full of passion for Jesus? Or are the things of the world and the busyness of life and all the burdens and pressures pressing in upon you? And the flame has gone down to just a little whiff of smoke. Jesus won't extinguish that. He'll blow upon it as you come to Him.

I think about Henry Blackaby, I'm sure many of you have read his book or seen the video of Experiencing God and you've heard about Saskatoon and how the Lord came to bless the church there and so on, you know. When Henry went to Saskatoon, Saskatoon church had 17 members. Well, I don't hear any Irish out there.

Where is that? 17 members. The flame was almost gone. But when the breath of God came, the fire ignited.

That little church was responsible for 32 congregations beginning. For many missionaries going around the world. For all kinds of incredible things.

And Lighthouse, you are doing a wonderful work. I love being in your midst and I love the sense of God at work in you. I think too about a revival in East Africa where one pastor, as he would lead that, every once in a while he would say to the congregation that he led, see ya.

And they didn't bother asking when will you be back? Where are you going? Or whatever. He was a man who in his own heart when he started to feel that that sense of the power and the passion and the flame for God was diminishing. He wanted to go away out into the bush and stay there until he knew again in his heart that what he had was right from God and he could come back and preach it with the authority of heaven.

Dear friends, that's what happens when Jesus takes that smoking wick that is in our hearts and reignites it for His glory and for His kingdom's sake. Sorry, I got Irish there for a minute. I love you guys.

It's so good to be with you this morning in these days. Well, let's look at the third thing the verse says and then it will be time for John to sit down and try to be good. It says, until He leads justice to victory, He will bring justice to victory.

You ever hear that saying? It's not fair. I know it doesn't happen in your houses here, but I hear it in Regina quite a bit. That's just not fair.

That's not right. That's not fair. Look, here's the third picture of Jesus where He brings justice to victory.

Now think about that. There may be all kinds of things that have happened to you that are not fair, that are not right. Maybe you've been hurt by this, that, or the other thing.

But thank God our life does not rest in the powers of this earth and our failures do not need to punish us more and more and more. And our injustices and offensive wounds don't need to disqualify us from following after the Lord. Jesus will bring justice to victory.

And you see, this is where we need so much that second trip to the cross. Because we're either going to feel a victim or a victor in this life. And if it's about me, I'll always be a victim.

Five foot five. Where's Ryan Dick? There he is. Six foot three.

It's just not fair, buddy. You see, if it's about me, I'll always be the victim. But if I've come to the truth of Galatians 2 and verse 20, it says, I have been crucified with Christ.

Dead to sin and self and Satan in Him. Nevertheless, I live alive in Christ. But it is not I. It is Christ who lives in me.

And the life that I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. Now when I get there, that's victory side. For Jesus has taken all those wounds and healed them.

Jesus has taken all of those injustices and He brings it to victory. We need that second trip to the cross to die to self and to be able to surrender self entirely to the Lord. Let me just draw to a close with a little story.

Some years ago, I had the privilege of ministering three years in a row in a tent crusade down in Fannsburg, Pennsylvania amongst the Mennonite churches down in that area. Had a glorious time. They put up a tent and they put wood shavings on the ground and I was able to say at the invitation time, now you can hit the sawdust trail.

That's what the evangelists of old used to say. But you know, while I was there, the second year that I went down to do those meetings, I saw a man whose name was Henry Gibson. And Henry ushered every night.

He was there at every service. And I said to Henry's pastor, man, that's a great guy. I'll bet he's a real servant in the church.

And the pastor looked at me with big tears coming in his eyes and he said, John, Henry's in every service. He ushers in most of them. We never have a meeting that he doesn't show up.

But Henry doesn't know Jesus. And I said, why not? He said, I've talked to him many times and he just says, it can't happen for me. Well, you know, the Irish are sometimes fairly bold.

And so I said to Henry after the service that night, what are you doing for lunch tomorrow? Nothing, he said. I said, well, good. I'd like to come to your place for lunch.

And he said, really? I said, yeah. Can the pastor and I come to your house for lunch? Well, he said, you know, I'm a widower and you're not going to get much. You know, it's not going to be a really good meal or anything.

I've got some deer meat and some bread. I said, that's good. That's perfect.

We went over to his house the next day. While he was putting some bread and so on on the table, I looked on the wall. And here are three certificates of citation from Henry's military service.

And I looked at them and I said to him, Henry, I see you've been decorated for bravery. Ah, I have those, he said. You can tell somebody who's really been in conflict because they never want to talk about it.

They never want to get into details. And I see on it, 3rd Army, 3rd Army, 3rd Army. And so I said, Henry, you served under General Patton.

Yeah, he said, how'd you know that? I said, I know he commanded the 3rd Army. He said, what are these for, Henry? Well, he said, I rescued a fellow who was wounded. And then I rescued a guy in a Jeep that was wounded.

And the other one is for something similar. But that third incident, Henry didn't want to talk about at all. When we sat down and were eating some of that good deer meat and bread, I said to him, Henry, what was your unit? He said, I was with a reconnaissance group.

And I said, Henry, were you in the reconnaissance group that liberated the camp? And Henry started to cry. And I said, Henry, how many men of your squad survived? And he said, just me. And I said, Henry, your problem is you think that Jesus can't forgive you because you can't forgive yourself for surviving when all the others are gone.

And he looked at me and said, that's exactly it. They're all gone. What right do I have to be here? And you know, sometimes that's the issue, isn't it? It's not hard to forgive others.

But it's sometimes hard to forgive ourselves. And I sat with Henry that afternoon and we talked for a bit and we went into the Scriptures together. And I said to him, you know, Henry, Jesus wants to bring justice to victory.

Stop being the victim and embrace all that Christ has for you. Two things happened that night in the service in the tent. When I gave the invitation and asked people to come forward, the first person who came was Henry.

And my heart was soaring. Yeah, I was kind of on the inside going, woohoo! And at the same time, a great big bee came and stung me right in the middle of the hand. And I remembered Paul's words.

In case I get to be too puffed up, a messenger of Satan came. Look at those three pictures of Jesus. That little bruised life, He won't break it off.

That smoking wick, He won't extinguish it. He'll reignite it. And He will lead justice to victory.

If this morning under the sound of my voice there's someone and you're feeling like a victim, oh, dear one, let me appeal to you this day. Turn that around. Come indeed to the cross of Christ.

Come and allow Him to bring you to victory side. It's long since time that I quit, so let me just pray and then I'll turn it back over to Pastor Henry. Will you just bow your heads and close your eyes with me for a moment? As the Spirit of God is here in our midst and He's been speaking to our hearts, perhaps something of these three pictures is an area that the Lord is touching in your life today.

And if that's true, just as we're bowed in the place of prayer, and just before I pray, would you just take a moment and slip up your hand and say, Pastor John, would you pray for me today? Thank you. God bless you. So many, many, many hands.

You can just slip them down. Dear Heavenly Father, how I thank You that the Savior is not in the business of breaking us off, of snuffing us out, of leaving us in the place of victim. How I thank You that He who was bruised knows how to heal.

And He whose life was dulled at the cross momentarily, but not extinguished, for thank You for the resurrection, is able to bring us to the reigniting of that flame. And thank You, Lord, that You who were

victimized above all men know how to lead us from the place of victim to the place of victory. Lord, I pray for my brothers and sisters.

You saw the hands. You know the needs. You know the issues.

And I ask that You, Holy Spirit, would minister into every heart that sense of grace and healing and peace and power of God. Take us in this moment in repentance to You. Lord, forgive us for lingering in those places of being bruised and of smoking and of being victimized.

We come and ask You, Lord, cleanse again our hearts. Fill again our lives. Lift again our minds to be set upon the things above, not on the things of this earth.

In Jesus' strong name we pray. In God's people's sin, God bless you. Amen.

Thank you. Come and see us in Regina sometime.

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Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/reLN4KQ3-kE.mp4>

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