

“Hanging by a Thread”

9/8/19

Isaiah 42:1-3 NIV “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. 2 He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. 3 A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;”

Now, these words from Isaiah the Prophet are a prophecy about Jesus Christ.

God calls him “my chosen one” and says I will “put my Spirit on him.”

He will be the one to finally bring justice to the earth where every wrong will be made right.

But then Isaiah tells us something powerful and precious about the character of Jesus’ by describing the way he will deal with people who are on the edge, who are barely hanging on:

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

This verse describes a gentle Jesus, a merciful Messiah, a loving Lord regarding hurting people.

So Isaiah's first illustration is focused on:

I. Deeply damaged people

The word "bruised" here comes from a Hebrew word meaning "cracked or half broken."

It's a metaphor for a person who has been deeply hurt, devastated, broken, and bruised.

They are not fully destroyed, but ALMOST....

They are hanging by a thread, almost gone under, barely putting one foot in front of the other.

The Prophet first compares them to a bruised reed.

We've all seen these kinds of water reeds in some lake or pond.

They are long, grass like plants that grow to a height of anywhere from 3 to 8 ft.

You often see them bent or sort of snapped because they are very fragile and easily damaged.

The Prophet compares these fragile reeds to hurt, damaged people.

But you could also use the illustration of a cracked jar of clay, because “bruised” means “cracked or broken.”

A once beautiful jar that was on display for all to see has been damaged.

Life has dealt it some hard blows to the point of cracking it.

It is now damaged goods no one wants.

This first illustration of a bruised reed or cracked jar suggests that the damage is visible—it’s outer damage that others see.

What has happened to this person is no mystery....The various trials that have brought them to this place are known.

But the second illustration Isaiah uses—the smoldering wick—points to the inward life of a person, to a condition of heart that might be hidden to most people.

In this second illustration, Isaiah is focused on:

II. Burned out people

We've all seen a candle that has burned down and is just barely flickering.....the slightest breeze would blow it out.

That's the picture here!

The Hebrew word here for *smoldering* means "barely a flicker, burning feebly, almost extinguished."

While the bruised reed or cracked pot are visible, the smoldering wick may be unknown to most of the people in this person's life.

Because it is their *inner life*, the hidden part of them that is in trouble.

**This person may have a great job, nice car,
-wears the best clothes,
-carries a Neiman Marcus credit card,
-and sports a million dollar Hollywood smile more permanent than Mona Lisa's.**

But on the inside their inner fire, zeal, hope, spiritual passion, that first love that once blazed brightly is barely flickering.

They feel like they're holding their world up with a tenuous toothpick.

They've got it all but it has no meaning.

The thrill is gone from their spiritual journey, and the once bright flame is now a fragile flicker.

This is so important because it's your inner man, the strength of your spiritual life, that props you up and carries you.

The Proverbs say, "A healthy spirit conquers adversity, but what can you do when the spirit is crushed?" (Prov 18:14 Message)

"The spirit of a man can help him through his sickness, but who can carry a broken spirit?" (NLV)

And usually the two conditions go together—Whatever it is that cracked the outer pot has also affected the candle within.

- The winds of adversity blew,**
- The rains of hardship fell,**

-A flood of trials beat on your spiritual house until the inner flame became a flicker and you feel like you're hanging by a thread.

These things happen to Christians all the time...

According to Jesus they are a part of life!

"Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world" (John 16:33 NLT).

But I have good news today—These are the people Jesus came for!

He didn't come to judge, condemn, and destroy the weak and fragile of this world.

The Prophet said, "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out."

Jesus will not crush or break the already bruised and broken....He will not shatter the already cracked jar.

He will not deepen your afflictions, worsen your trials, or multiply your sorrows.

Rather, he brings healing, restoration, wholeness and renewed hope!

ILLUS: I read this week about Canadian pop star Justin Bieber, who has now turned to Christ.

On the outside it looked like Justin had the world by the tail— fame, fortune, women—he seemed to have it all.

But Justin was a bruised reed.

He says he ultimately reached a dangerous place where he was—“Descending into a downward spiral of partying and drug abuse,” and found himself “lost and confused.”

Depressed and angry, he withdrew from those who cared about him and found it hard to even get out of bed in the morning.

But in the end he says, “It was only Jesus who could turn it all around!”

Now he says, “Even when the odds are against you, keep fighting. Jesus loves you!”

The Prophet Isaiah not only mentions the character of Jesus, but also the details of His ministry:

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the suffering and afflicted. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted, to announce liberty to captives, and to open the eyes of the blind. 2 He has sent me to tell...all who mourn that he will give: beauty for ashes; joy instead of mourning; praise instead of heaviness” (Isaiah 61:1-3 LB).

This is the ministry of Jesus!

He’s not a destroyer, he’s a healer.

He’s not a condemner, he’s an encourager.

He didn’t come to knock you down, He came to pick you up!

Even when you can’t *WORK UP* the strength to *LOOK UP*, He will *PICK YOU UP* when you can’t *GET UP* on your own!

And when your *INNER FIRE* is barely flickering, He will care for, cherish and feed your spiritual life with Holy Spirit oil till it burns brightly again.

Now, the last thing I want to mention about our gentle, merciful Savior is that, in His hands:

III. Today's pain is preparing you for tomorrow's promotion

God never wastes a pain in the lives of His children.

And when you read your Bible you will find that PAIN often precedes PROMOTION in the lives of God's people.

God being God is able to use our pain for His glory and our spiritual growth.

For instance:

-Jesus had the pain of his Cross before the glory of his crown.

-Israel had the pain of the wilderness before the fruit of the Promised Land.

-David had the pain of persecution from Saul before his promotion to king over Israel.

-Joseph went from the painful pit of prison to the pinnacle of promotion in Egypt.

-Job went through the pain of testing to the promotion of receiving double for his trouble.

I could go on, but you get the picture!

In God's hands, the Christian goes from the pain of trials to the promotion of ministry to others:

"What a wonderful God we have—he is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the source of every mercy, and the one who so wonderfully comforts and strengthens us in our hardships and trials. And why does he do this? So that when others are troubled, needing our sympathy and encouragement, we can pass on to them this same help and comfort God has given us" (2 Cor. 1:3-4 LB).

Summary:

Jesus came for the broken, the burned out, and to transform our pain into spiritual gain.

