

# Matthew

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     the twelfth chapter of the gospel according to Matthew the twentieth verse a bruised reed shall he not break and smoking flax shall he not quench till he send forth judgment unto victory some have raised a question as to what exactly is intended by this word and who it applies to but the meaning seems to me to be very clear especially if we take it in the setting of the prophecy in Isaiah from which this word is a quotation it was prophecy concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ as the servant of God into this world and of the spirit he would manifest amongst men in his dealings with them and this describes it or one characteristic of it that he would deal with such as are implied by these descriptions of a bruised reed and smoking flax in a very tender and compassionate way and that he would bring forth judgment for them unto victory now there's no need for me to take up the time this morning with opening remarks we will come in our consideration at once to the text and its meaning and it appears to express three considerations for our meditation and I hope our spiritual prophecy first of all there is a state and condition implied under the metaphor of a bruised reed and smoking flax there is secondly the way in which the Lord in the compassion of his heart and his tender spirit will deal with such as are in that case implied he will not break them nor will he quench the smoking flax and then there is thirdly set forth this that he will ultimately bring forth their case or this is how

I understand the last expression in the text he will bring forth their case which may seem to them often to be doubtful and they may often fear how the issue of it will be and whether they will ever get the victory over their sins and temptations and foes and fears but he will bring forth judgment that is for them and not against them he will bring forth judgment unto victory that then seems to be the general lie out of the subject let us consider first the condition that is here implied and when I briefly describe this condition I am hoping that I may be speaking a word that will be helpful to any who may be in that state of mind at this time for in a congregation of this size one feels there must be many and very varied conditions of mind and spiritual feelings

I can hardly conceive that everyone who has spiritual life in their hearts is in just the same measure of activity and comfort and peace and joy it is good to know that any are favoured in that way but one has in their mind that there may be others to whom a word like this is exactly suitable to afford them encouragement and relief of mind what then is intended by the metaphor a bruised reed now if we look at the metaphor itself it is of course very expressive now a bruised reed is very weak it expresses a state of spiritual weakness of inability to stand up to things to bear the burden of them upon the mind to face up to them with fortitude and energy and strength of spirit just the opposite to that a bruised reed is weak

I suppose that nothing could be weaker than a bruised reed because to begin with a reed has not much strength in the very nature of it not like an oak with roots deep in the soil a strong firm stem and powerful limbs that can stand the wind that buffets it and the frosts that chill it and the conditions that come upon it it is not of that character isn't a reed it is weak in its nature but then when a reed that is in its nature weak is bruised it is weaker still it is not bruised at least it can stand up under its own weight but when it's bruised down it goes the least touch and it gives way to it it has no vigor it has lost the stamina that it has a bruised reed is weak and then there's another thing a bruised reed is useless think what use a bruised reed can be put to take a piece of timber that's stout and strong you can do something with it but a bruised reed what can you do with it it is useless and not to dwell too long upon the metaphor a bruised reed is unsightly there's nothing about it attractive there's no flower to start with it's very ponied it's bruised a bruised reed represents that which is weak which is useless which is unattractive now let us take this metaphor then in the spiritual implication of it it implies then a state of spiritual weakness and it is in this state of spiritual weakness or what causes it that one feels like a bruised reed our nature as human nature is comparatively weak in itself it is not like the angelic nature

God made man upright but not strong enough to withstand temptation our nature as such has a certain weakness about it but once sin has entered into it bruised it wounded it and brought it under its awful power than how weak our nature is now when one comes to feel that they are bruised in different ways they feel so weak and so useless and there seems nothing about them that is any attraction any beauty anything that appears to others desirable that is their feeling their bruised what bruises man well different things but one thing of course we are all bruised by sin sin has done our nature an awful hurt it has weakened us it has made us now that no man of himself can stand up against sin nor overcome the temptations that in different ways assail him and when a sense of sin comes on the conscience and past transgressions wounds and bruises the spirit when the very memory of them makes our spirit bow and bend before

[10:17] God then we are like a bruised wreath everyone who has ever known and some of you have known this some of you have known this painfully what it is to have sin brought upon your soul in the sense of your guilt in it your past transgressions your bad ways and thoughts and feelings and imaginations and propensities and it makes you feel that you just cannot stand up under it you cannot stand up under it it comes back upon you in such a way as to make your spirit within you give way under the under the weight that you feel it brings to bear upon your heart you feel just like the publican who was too weak in his spirit to lift up his eyes even to heaven but could only smite upon his breast because there he felt the bruise of sin and the weakness of it

God be merciful to me a sinner my friends it isn't only when we are first brought to feel the burden and bruising of our sin that we come into this sense of weakness and of helplessness and of uselessness for one does feel like that when they're bruised with sin they do feel useless and they do feel unattractive their spirit bears and gives way within them but there's subsequent times in the experience of many when they come into this condition it is sometimes so in spiritual experience that these distressing convictions do not at first pass them upon the heart and conscience as they do with some others it pleases the

Lord to impart spiritual life to the soul and to raise up the spirit of faith to believe and the blood to receive and embrace the truth as it is in Jesus Christ but it doesn't follow that they will get through their spiritual life like that they come into deeper feelings and distresses subsequently and it may be that it is the Lord's will to permit them to learn this lesson of their weakness and their helplessness and their uselessness the hard way somehow to learn this the hard way if it is so that we are preserved from outward lapses and falling into sin it's much to be thankful for it doesn't need that to cause us to feel like bruised reeds we can feel that from within our own hearts and our own minds but sometimes it pleases the Lord to permit one and another who are right at heart who've got the root of the matter in them sure enough but to fall in such a way that they become very bruised by sin bruised reeds they brought themselves into such a state and taste as that distress and shame of conscience makes them bow down in their spirit they feel they're no use they're no use they've made a complete mess of everything sin has got the better of them and they bruised themselves by their falling into it such cases my brethren are bruised reeds the bruised reeds of my text and if the

Lord Jesus Christ will not break them he does not become his people to break them we should be very careful about this for the God to sin in his people the rod is best left in his hand to use he's the best one to chasten a child of God for their faults and their follies he does it with wisdom and compassion we should be forbearing we should not be condoning sin but we should be forbearing I read in my Bible of that love that covereth sin I read nothing of a love that exposes them proclaims them on the house tops for all the world to know I know nothing of that love that's not the love in the

Bible in the Bible you read this that love covereth all sin we cannot forgive one another's sin that belongs to God but we should be careful how we expose them the exposure of the sin of a child of God meets not the Lord's approval I'm very sure of that a bruised you'd read he will not break in that way we are bruised by the trials and afflictions of life these are themselves bring no guilt on the conscience affliction is not sinful the Lord Jesus Christ was afflicted in all our afflictions he was afflicted but he never sinned affliction are often the Lord's chastening ways that they're not sinful in themselves but they necessarily have a weakening effect upon our spirit and especially when it sometimes is that one affliction one trial or one sorrow doesn't come alone it seems sometimes as though it's one trial after another one affliction comes on another affliction and we feel we have strength to bear the distress and the weakness of body and the weakness of mind that afflictions bring upon us afflictions bruise us in different ways and weaken us it isn't by any means always at a charge of

[18:04] God can lift up his head under affliction and say oh this will work together for good there's no question about that I can bear this sometimes affliction makes our spirit bow and stew and feel our weakness and just feel well we haven't strength to bear up under these things that revolve upon us they weaken us afflictions constitute one way in which the Lord often weakens our strength in the way temptations bruise it is very significant that Satan is said to buffet there was a messenger from Satan a temptation I suppose it was that assailed the apostle Paul after one of his brightest and most blessed experiences there came a messenger from Satan to buffet him to strike him to bruise him to hit him here and to hit him there and it brought his spirit down it made even such a strong believer as the apostle

Paul feels like a bruised wreath temptation temptations hurt us even if we do not fall into them they hurt us it is significant that the Lord Jesus Christ suffered being tempted he never sinned being tempted but he did suffer being tempted Satan's fiery darts don't don't just fall off us and leave us untouched and unwounded they pierce they penetrate they wound they bruise sorrow bruises us takes away our strength weakens our spirit I mean real painful sorrow bruises our spirit now I must not take all the time this morning on this first consideration but that is a bruised wreath then and a bruised wreath shall he not brave now let us take the second description or the second part of this description and smoking flax shall he not quench what is smoking flax well

I think it is generally understood to mean the wick of a lamp indeed one translation of this passage renders it so the smoking wick I suppose that it really means that the wick of the lamps of those days really was made of flax and the flax as wick is as we know it being soaked in oil gives it life and it flames very much as the lamps of the wise virgins when they trimmed them sent forth their light clear and bright but now here is not a flax that's burning clear and bright and fervent but smoking smoking the smoking flax shall he not quench what then the smoking flax implies smoking flax implies a low spiritual condition as one may feel it in themselves mind

I'm speaking of this case as someone's feelings themselves others may not see it so others may think one is strong spiritually holds on their ways and may appear to manifest pervency of spirit in the ways of God but then one himself may feel very different about his own case if to others the flax may burn bright and clear to him it seems more smouldering smoking smoking flax implies a low spiritual state as one feels it now I'm not setting this before you as a desirable state I'm setting it before you as a state that some if not all at some time feel to be in and some might despise it this low spiritual state even scorn it the Lord

Jesus Christ does not so he does not despise this state of heart and mind that is described as smoking flax smoking flax may be said to express for instance faith when it is not strong and active but when it is weak and low for faith has various degrees as to its exercise though it is always the same as to its nature the least degree of faith is faith the greatest degree of faith is only faith but it's faith in the flame an instance comes to my mind that expresses exactly what I'm trying to convey there came one to the

[ 24 : 45 ] Lord Jesus Christ very burdened about his son and the distressing condition of body and mind his son was often in and the inability of the disciples or any others for that matter to help him this sad case and he came to Jesus Christ and he said if thou canst do anything have mercy on us and help us if you can Lord as I would say I'm afraid to believe you can really everything else has failed and I can hardly believe now there's any hope at all but if it should be so if you can do anything have mercy on us and help well no you wouldn't call that very strong faith would you you wouldn't say that was faith burning bright and clear and confident not such faith but in the degree of it as the leper had the man who was full of leprosy an incurable and a repulsive condition and he said

Lord if there will there can make me clean now that was faith bright and clear but here was a smouldering flax Lord if you can do anything if you can do anything and see how the Lord dealt with it he didn't say don't insult me like that by suggesting that I can't do anything or that it's very doubtful if I can no he dealt with this smoking flax he said if you can believe if thou canst believe and the Lord has a way which some of us know from our experience of his way with us that when he speaks a word in our hearts especially it may be an admonitory word he gives the ability to respond to it for where the word of

Jesus Christ is there is power power and when he spoke that word to the poor man if thou canst believe power went with the word and his faith shone at once lord lord lord i believe lord i believe so can the lord deal with smoke and flax and raise it to a flame a warm heart so half hearted who just have a hope that he might do something into a confidence that he will take the desires of the heart now how weak they may sometimes be for spiritual light in the soul expresses itself very much in a way of spiritual desires just as natural life as those desires pertain to natural life for those things that are necessary to it or gratifying to it or attractive to it as the case may be so spiritual life has those desires that belong to that spiritual life for those things that are necessary to it and desirable to it but sometimes these desires are very weak and very low it is so sometimes that the commencement of spiritual life in the heart if it's a weak commencement if the beginning is small there are desires for the things of

God for Jesus Christ for the knowledge of his name and his love and his truth but these desires sometimes seem so weak they're not fervent at least you may feel they're not fervent enough to make it sure that it belongs to spiritual life in your soul you might suppose to yourself that if your desires sprang from real spiritual life it'd be more strong more ardent more fervent more persistent more prevailing that you say my desires are so weak so poor they don't seem to get me anything they seem to end in desiring and not in enjoying let me say this to you those feeble desires those wishes so weak is

Jesus inspired you must believe that is Jesus inspired and did you still see for he will not quench those feeble desires in your soul but he will nourish them until he satisfies them love seems low sometimes in our heart and we find ourselves in sympathy with Lincoln's hymn do I love the Lord or no you know that you would love him if you could but you simply have not that spiritual energy in your heart really to love Jesus Christ and spiritual zeal sometimes gets very low and languor and weakness seems to paralyze the energies of your heart well now what is this then you're smoking flats that's what it is you're smoking flats now there's two things about this first be very thankful that there's that in your heart it does smoke and that keeps smoking but if it doesn't burst into a flame it doesn't die out entirely in your spirit and it is a wonderful thing that the flat should keep smoking what makes it smoke at all spiritual life in the soul what keeps it smoking the influence of sin of our carnal nature of all those conditions within us that are about as opposite to spiritual holiness and spiritual love as they can possibly be it's spiritual life makes the flat smoke and it's corruption and carnality and earthliness that keeps it only smoking but the

[ 32 : 36 ] Lord will not will not quaint the smoking flat any more than he will break the bruised leaves now for time it's nearly time for me to close and so I must be very brief on the remainder of this consideration now let us turn from the condition for a few moments the way the Lord Jesus Christ deals with it a bruised reed shall he not break and the smoking flat shall he not quench what does this imply it implies several things first of all it implies the compassion and tenderness of his heart who else might scorn such a state and such as are in it the Lord Jesus

Christ does not he is very compassionate I was thinking this morning that everything about Jesus Christ everything that was characteristic of Jesus Christ was exceptional it was unequal there are features of the spirit of Jesus Christ wherever the grace of God is and is evident there are there is a likeness but the distinctive characteristics of Jesus Christ are unequaled there is none so tender as he was and is none so compassionate but we must not suppose from this that Jesus Christ did no strength and firmness about matters with regard to firmness and fearlessness he was the lion of the tribe of Judah but with regard to tenderness and compassion he was the lamb of God he combined the fearlessness of the lion with the tenderness of the lamb everything in Jesus

Christ is exceptional now Jesus Christ had a tenderness that was unequal and not only soul but Jesus Christ had such perfect understanding he read the case exactly all how much we wound perhaps one another in different ways not so much from intention to wound as from a misunderstanding and a misreading of one another's case and real feelings we don't understand sufficiently now the Lord Jesus Christ understands exactly he reads the case he knows what there is in it that's wrong he knows what there's in it that's right in his sight that is that which he himself has imparted through the heart he understands the side divine he not only hears it but he understands it he marks a secret groan his eloquent language to

Jesus Christ is a secret groan he reads it exactly he recognizes it he sees a matter to the very root of it he has such understanding it was said of him prophetically that he would be made to be of quick quick understanding that is penetrating he can understand exactly well now that's another feature he will not break the bruised he has too much understanding and too much tenderness and sympathy and another thing the Lord Jesus Christ has such experience of all this himself I know he was not bruised by his own sin he was not self bruised but he was bruised by ours he was bruised by ours and he was bruised by the hand of God's strict justice it pleased the father to bruise him because he stood assured he bore sin and it pleased the father to bruise his own beloved son to sin he had put him to grieve his soul was made an offering for sin for man to sympathise he must have experience experience goes much farther than observation and even with tenderness of disposition experience alone can give one a full understanding of grief and sorrow and distress and bruising of heart and mind but you say did Jesus

Christ have any experience of that other feature was he ever smoking flat well not in the sense that spiritual life was ever known in his blessed heart but what do you make of expressions like this I am a worm and no man despised of men I am a worm and no man that's the most state to be in isn't it he was in that state the most tender sympathy joined with the most perfect understanding joined with the most complete experience that Jesus Christ was just the one to deal with bruised wreaths and smoking flat a case comes to my mind outstanding so I'll just quickly mention take the case of Peter

[ 39 : 43 ] Peter thought himself very strong he had no idea that he was as weak as a reed he thought he could well withstand any temptation to deny Jesus Christ Jesus Christ meant so much to Peter and his affection for Jesus Christ was so strong that he felt he could defy death itself to overcome his strength of mind Lord he said I'm ready to go to prison and to death for him but he was only a poor bruised wreath for all that and when the case was put to the trial he denied his Lord with oaths and curses ah Peter what will you do now what will you do now and the Lord turned and looked upon

Peter he didn't say anything he looked upon Peter and as one of the hymn writers has put it turn and look upon me Lord and melt my heart of stone was everything in that look that was tender compassionate forgiving restoring Peter was the better for being bruised when there were art converted that is restored strengthened by brethren Peter you can't strengthen your brethren until you be bruised yourself the Lord will not break a bruised he will not quench the smoking flask now lastly and very briefly let us look at the third consideration till he send forth judgment unto victory now here the case the other similitude rather changes from a tender healing friend and physician to an advocate the case is now represented as being a case in dispute in legal dispute and the understanding of the cases like this there's much against us if we're bruised it reads sinners not only bruised us but it stands chargeable against us and there are many features in our case that we feel look very black against us very and it may be a question as to what the issue of it will be for there is a judgment to come how will we stand the judgment will the judgment be for us or against us now let me bring in that word of the apostle

John brethren these things write I unto you that you sin not but if any man sins we have an advocate with the father Jesus Christ the righteous he will take our case in hands if we are his he will be our advocate against Satan and all his charges and before God in all his perfect and strict and holy justice for God must condemn sin to be a just God now Jesus will take our case in hand as an advocate takes his client's case in hand and pleads it in the court of law and it is a successful advocate he will bring his client's case forth unto victory he will get the verdict on his client's side he will get the case discharged if he brings it forth unto victory if he fails well then it's defeat and his client stands condemned for whatever is laid against his charge he has failed to make the case victorious now our blessed advocate has never failed in any case that he's taken into his hands to plead he will bring every case forth unto victory that is to say the judgment the verdict of a holy just and righteous

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