

ISAIAH ... and his broken pen

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(Isaiah 42: 1-3; Matthew 12:14-21)

It would appear that a delightful word-picture may be found in this text. The prophet had been gathering the thin reeds which grew so plentifully in the Jordan valley. Tied in a neat bundle, they were now attached to his belt, as he sat at his writing table. The end of the reeds had been sharpened, and with ink close at hand, the scribe commenced to write. When the reed point became too saturated, Isaiah discarded his pen, lifted another reed from the bundle at his side, and the work continued. Then suddenly the writer frowned. His new quill had been damaged. Somehow it had been bruised, and as he exerted pressure upon it, the reed buckled within his fingers. He was about to throw it down when suddenly a whisper thrilled his soul. "When Messiah comes, a bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench. . . ." Seven centuries later Matthew remembered the prophet's statement, and because he could find no more suitable words to express his feelings, he cited Isaiah's prediction in his gospel.

The Lord's Great Patience

Isaiah saw broken reeds ; Christ saw broken men ; Matthew saw reeds and men, and they were strangely alike. Even the best of us are apt to be unreliable at times, and it would seem then that all God's labor has been in vain. When He would take and use us for the fulfillment of His will, flaws make us unfit for service. We are not as He had hoped ; sin has ruined our spiritual dependability. Why did Matthew think of this text at that particular moment? "Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him. But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all " (Matt. 12: 14-15). He knew no bitterness of spirit, and discrimination was unknown in His actions. He healed them all. Even the disappointing human reeds received their share of blessing, for He refused to discard them. Why was this so?

The Lord's Great Purpose

Did Isaiah correctly anticipate the question which would arise in the minds of all his readers? Why should the Lord patiently persevere with broken reeds, when so many others were within reach? The prophet smiled and changed his simile: "And the smoking flax shall he not quench. . . ." We see the smouldering flax and the thin wisp of smoke lazily curling upward from its black edge. A brilliant flame once burned there, but something has interfered with the flow of fuel ; the glow has disappeared ; the light has gone. Impetuosity says, "Pinch it out." Hope replies, "No. Gently breathe upon it, and do all that is possible to renew the flame. When Messiah comes, 'the smoking flax shall he not quench.'" There are men within whose hearts the fires of God once burned, but alas, hindrances prevented the continuance of their usefulness. Their flame of devotion faltered, dwindled, and ultimately disappeared. They who once shone brightly for God have now backslidden into the shadows. Faint wisps of smoke tell their own sorry tale of spiritual depression and frustration-of a soul which is like a piece of smoking flax. Law demands judgment; but grace refuses, and proceeds to try and rekindle the flame within the human heart.

The Lord's Great Praise

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" And in his name shall the Gentiles trust." Matthew
watched the surging crowds, and knew that no man was
denied access to Christ. Jew and Gentile, rich and poor; all
were welcomed and all were healed. And in one glorious
burst of revelation, the disciple recognized the purpose of
God in Christ. He had come to seek and to save that which
was lost ; and through His power even the most degraded
men, the most unresponsive and sinful of men, could be
lifted to higher realms of spiritual experience. The kingdom
of God could never be limited by racial barriers, and Jewish
prejudice could never prevent the outflow of divine love.
All men had a place in the affections of the Highest-" till
he send forth judgment unto victory," or as one has said, " till
judgment be overcome by victory." Seven centuries
divided the two scribes. Isaiah looked on ; Matthew looked
back ; and their vision met in Christ. A broken pen! A
broken man! Isaiah thought of his reed ; Matthew thought
of himself ; and probably both were glad to say, " And in his
name . . . shall we all trust."

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear:
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives away his fear

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