

Who was/is Jesus?
Matthew 12:15-21

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The 2016 Campaign for President of the United States is in full swing. Some consider that position to be the most powerful in the world. One of the key parts of winning election is getting your candidates face and name familiar enough for people to recognize them. So we're going to do a little survey to see who you recognize in this race.

So how many of you could name – number 1 – (Bernie Sanders)

How many recognize this one – number 2 – Ted Cruz

How many recognize this person – number 3 – Marco Rubio

Now how many recognize this woman – number 4 – Hilary Clinton

Lastly how many recognize this guy –number 5 – Donald Trump.

Ok, so the first picture is Bernie Sanders. He is considered the only serious challenger to #4 - Hilary Clinton for the Democratic nomination. Number 2 is Ted Cruz – the Republican senator from Texas who was born in Canada. Number 3 is Marco Rubio, the junior senator from Florida who claims now to be running on Marcomentum with the results of this past week's Iowa vote. #5 is Donald Trump – the billionaire businessman who has made headlines with some of his less politically correct statements.

Each candidate has to raise millions of dollars, make TV and media appearances, show up at debates and argue forcefully to get the audience's attention. They must convince a majority of people in their party to nominate them for president. Then they have to convince a majority of Americans to elect them. People judge them not only on their positions, speeches and abilities. They are also judged by their image, looks, sound and tone of voice and whether or not people like them. By the end of November, we will know who succeeded in convincing the most people that they should be given what some consider the most powerful office in the world.

Now even if you're not paying much attention to this race, we all experience the pull or pressure of someone wanting our support or money or allegiance at different times in our lives. We just came through a Canadian federal election last fall and a provincial election last May. People try to sell us something or get us to buy in to their product. On your computer or phone, you cannot get away from pop up ads or offers that seek your support or sales.

So who or what gets your attention? What kind of things do you appreciate in someone who seeks your support or endorsement or allegiance? This appeal for attention and allegiance has been going on for centuries in various forms.

Ancient people didn't get to vote. But if they didn't like the royalty or power ruling over them, there was always someone they could follow or support who might lead an uprising. There was Spartacus who led the slave revolt against the Romans. Lenin and some of his cronies capitalized on unrest against the Russian Tsar and eventually seized power in Russia. Even in Nazi Germany, there were many Germans who risked their lives to resist and oppose the Nazi regime like pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Think about the Jews in first century Palestine. They lived under the oppressive rule of the Romans. Though they had some rights, this foreign power occupied their homeland with its army. The Jews looked for a Messiah who would deliver them from their oppressors.

One possibility was this teacher named Jesus. Now if you and I had the opportunity to put Jesus forward as a candidate for Messiah, what might we do? We might follow the pattern of a presidential campaign. Buy advertising on pottery and camel saddles. We would want his face everywhere so people could recognize Him. We would publish His words and get interviews with key people. We might go into neighborhoods and go door to door with a little pamphlet explaining Jesus' policies along with a little picture.

But we weren't in charge of presenting Jesus as candidate for Messiah. God was. It seems like God didn't get the memo about the "right way" to promote His Son as Messiah. Maybe that's why so many people rejected Jesus then and today. Or they ignore Him because maybe God failed to adequately hold their attention or appeal to what they like. Or maybe God knew exactly what He was doing in the way He revealed Jesus as Messiah.

So today, I'd like you to imagine that you are attending a presentation to hear from candidates claiming to be the Messiah; someone who save your life. Matthew presents Jesus to us. I will try my best to accurately portray Matthew's case. And at the end, we will have opportunity to decide if this Jesus is in fact the Messiah who can save your life.

Matthew 12:15-21 (ESV) (Page 687 in the Pew Bibles)

¹⁵ Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all¹⁶ and ordered them not to make him known. ¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁸ “Behold, my servant whom I have chosen,
my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased.

I will put my Spirit upon him,
and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.

¹⁹ He will not quarrel or cry aloud,
nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets;

²⁰ a bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not quench,

until he brings justice to victory;

²¹ and in his name the Gentiles will hope.”

Last week, we left off with the Pharisees plotting to destroy Jesus. He has just rebutted their charges that He and His disciples are Sabbath breakers. Now they want to get rid of Him. They are the religious leaders. They had great influence over the people. But Jesus has in a way just defeated them publicly by healing the man with the withered hand in the synagogue.

From a campaign perspective, it would be a good time for Jesus to capitalize on this victory. But Jesus takes a different approach. So who is this Jesus? **1 -He is someone who does not crush His opposition despite having the power to do so.** We see this in verses 15 and 16. Jesus somehow becomes aware of the Pharisees plot. He could take advantage of the situation and rile up the crowds about the unjust activities of the Pharisees. But instead he withdraws maybe to a more remote place. Yet many people follow Him. He carries on His healing ministry. Well, that’s a good way to build support and challenge the Pharisees. It gives further weight to His messianic claims.

But instead, Jesus orders them not to make him known. He keeps the crowd under control. It is a picture of restraint.

He doesn’t force things. Nor does He press His advantage to crush his opponents. One commentator notes the irony that the opponents whom Jesus spared were the very ones who thought the proper Messiah should crush all opposition. But Jesus retreats to do a healing ministry.

Matthew then inserts a quotation from the Old Testament. He introduces it with a formula we’ve seen before – “This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, Behold my servant whom I have chosen.” Now any Jew who knew their Scriptures would recognize Isaiah and servant. Isaiah talks about a Servant who will rescue or restore the nation in four servant songs. Isaiah 53 is the most famous. He was “pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for

our iniquities; the punishment upon him brought us peace and by his wounds we are healed.” But the first servant song is found in Isaiah 42 which Matthew quotes here.

It begins, “Behold, my servant whom I have chosen.” So Matthew connects the title “servant” to Jesus. This gives us another clue to His identity. Who is Jesus - 2 -**The Servant of the Lord**. But servants are not very powerful. Servants don’t get the spotlight. They don’t have their pictures on billboards. Servants come to serve not conquer or make war or win an election. Matthew started the Gospel by emphasizing Jesus’ royalty. Remember the genealogy from the royal line of David? Remember the wise men who worship Him as king? But now Matthew directs our focus more towards this suffering servant image. Though this seems like a retreat into weakness, it is actually an advance towards conquering. Through His suffering service, Jesus will conquer humankind’s greatest enemies – death, sin and the devil. But He came as a Servant.

Yet, He wasn’t any old servant. **3 –Someone who has divine backup, approval and empowering.** Verse 18 – *Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him.* God speaks here. He sent this servant He chose. He’s not one servant out of millions. He is the beloved servant. You might remember back in Matthew 3, when Jesus was baptized, the Father declared “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” Well Matthew takes God’s word “beloved” and inserts it into Isaiah’s prophecy. Now the Lord says “my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased.”

Is Matthew messing around with prophecy here? I don’t think so. I think he’s putting together the word of God spoken through Isaiah 42 and at Jesus’ baptism to reveal the great affection and love between Father and Son. This servant that God appoints is God’s beloved who pleases God’s soul.

God also says “I will put my Spirit on Him.” Now does this mean that Jesus did not have the Holy Spirit before His baptism when the Spirit descended like a dove? We don’t know how it all worked. John the Baptist was full of the Holy Spirit in His mother’s womb. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary. So in some sense, Jesus already had the Holy Spirit with him through His childhood and young adulthood. But at Jesus’ baptism the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus as a dove. I think this served two purposes. It commissioned Jesus to the new ministry of bringing in the kingdom of heaven. Just as the Spirit of God hovered over the waters in Genesis 1:2 indicating a new work of God was about to happen, the Spirit of God hovers over Jesus indicating this new work of God through Jesus. But at Jesus’ baptism, the

descent of the Spirit indicates the promised gifting or power for the Messianic ministry. We don't know exactly how this all worked but Jesus received from His Father and the Spirit what He needed to carry out His calling. Immediately following His baptism, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit goes out to meet and defeat the devil in the desert.

So far, we've seen a Jesus who could have crushed his opposition but chose to withdraw and restrain the crowd. We've met Jesus the Servant. We've discovered Jesus is chosen, beloved, well-pleasing and empowered by God. Now we might think it's time for Jesus promote Himself and making a case for his candidacy.

But look at what's described in verse 19. "He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets." Who is this Jesus? 4 – **Someone who did not assertively promote Himself as the Messiah.** He does not shout, cry out or raise His voice. He is not out to startle, dominate or advertise himself. He will not boldly demand allegiance or stir up the masses in the streets. Unlike the aggressive Messiah of popular expectation, Jesus presents Himself unassertively.

Think about how counter cultural this is to our expectations of someone who wants our allegiance or support. We expect a good sales pitch. We want an explanation of how our support will personally benefit us. Isn't that the question that we often ask before we vote? What's in it for me? How will this affect me or my family? But Jesus doesn't play that game. He goes about His ministry in a way that people can't help but follow Him. He is not out to sell something or bully us into buying something. He is not out to squeeze something out of us but simply demonstrates who He is.

To accept this kind of Messiah we have to think very differently than our culture. We are taught to always ask the question, "what's in it for me?" Jean Twenge in her book "Generation Me" writes today's under 35 young people have never known a world that put duty before self. " She has a section entitled "the matter of fact self-focus of Generation Me." She's not saying that this generation is necessarily self-absorbed so that they ignore everyone else. But consideration of the self and what makes us happy or what we like has become the number one factor for many in decision making.

Well if Jesus doesn't immediately make us happy or Jesus doesn't present Himself the way we like, does that mean we reject Him or ignore Him? Those of us older than 35 better not be pointing the finger at the under 35's. We can slide very easily into the "what's in it for me" or "what do I like" mindset. Instead of asking "what's in it for me," we

need to ask “what’s the right thing to do?” Remember during the series on Job, he was faced with the question – what’s the right thing to do? Would he serve God even though there might be nothing in it for him? Will he continue to follow God even though he lost everything? Would he pray for his friends who tried to get him to confess to something he didn’t do? In Job 42:9 he prays for them before he receives anything from God. He did the right thing when there was nothing in it for him. That’s the question we need to keep asking in life.

Jesus did not assertively promote Himself as Messiah. He didn’t try to sell us something. He displayed who He was. This display brings us to the second last identifier of Jesus. Who was Jesus?

5 - A compassionate caregiver for the most vulnerable. Verse 20 “A bruised reed he will not break and smoldering wick he will not quench.” I think this is one of the most beautiful pictures of Christ’s tenderheartedness towards people. Reed plants had various uses but were not very useful once they were bruised. A bruised reed is nearly broken. A smoldering wick is like a flickering candle.

Think about what’s involved in ensuring that a bruised reed won’t break. Maybe you had to put a strong stick beside it to give it support. You had to frequently check on it to ensure it was getting stronger and the bruise was healing. It took time, attention, care and patience.

Think about what’s involved in ensuring a smoldering wick does not get quenched. You have to protect it from excessive wind. You have to pour more oil in to refuel it and ensure that the wick is out of the oil so that it can burn freely. These pictures reveal someone who is attentive, patient, caring and devoted to restoration and new life.

But the prophet is not talking about Jesus’ gardening and lamp lighting ability. He’s talking about people who are like bruised reeds and smoldering wicks. The Servant will compassionately care for those who have been abused and who are about to expire because of misuse. These are the harassed and helpless, the weary and burdened. This is you and me.

Jesus displayed this concern throughout his ministry. He spends time with those discarded by society or devalued by the elite. Far from letting them be broken or quenched, He intervenes to bring them life. One commentator puts it this way – He is not dismissive of those who seem to be useless or beyond repair. He can mend the broken reed and fan into flame the smoldering wick. The reed has been internally damaged. The wick lacks external nourishment. The Servant is competent to both cure and supply.

He does that in our lives. We don't have to be some altogether productive, popular and well known person for Jesus to care about us. I think back over my life to times when I was like a bruised reed; deeply hurt by life or ministry; or when I was like a smoldering wick – wondering if I would make it. The Lord has come through and done His binding up and restoring work in my life. Many of you can testify to something similar. On February 28, we look forward to baptisms and testimonies where you will see and hear clearly about how Jesus binds up the wounded and fans into flame the flickering.

Jesus is the compassionate care giver. But He is no weakling.

The last piece of info we get about Jesus from this prophecy is found in the first and last verses. So verse 18 – I will put my Spirit upon Him *and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles*. Then verse 21 – “ A bruised reed he will not break and smoldering wick he will not quench *until he brings justice to victory; and in his name the Gentiles will hope*. Who is Jesus? **6 – The One who will deliver something that no one else can deliver.** The Roman Emperor could not deliver this. The High Priest of Israel could not deliver it. The president of the United States cannot deliver it. He will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. Then he will compassionately care until he brings justice to victory.

Justice means to set things right. It involves making things right. Jesus not only proclaims justice. He will bring justice to victory. Now anyone can talk about the need for justice. Anyone can cry out about the lack of justice. But there is only one who can bring justice to victory. That's Jesus. How has He and will He do that?

Well I could think of 3 ways. 1 - Jesus brought justice into individual lives as he righted wrongs or stood up for the vulnerable as He ministered. He continues to carry on that kind of work today where He brings justice through the efforts of people or through His own intervention into an unjust situation.

2 - Jesus also brought justice at the cross. We like to focus on all the ways we have been treated unjustly. But at the cross we are reminded of the justice that we deserved. Yet He paid it for us so that God's justice would be satisfied.

3 - Jesus will bring final justice on Judgment Day. Later in this Gospel in Matthew 25 we will meet Jesus the Judge who will perfectly carry out God's judgment. No human can provide justice in every day life AND satisfy God's justice with His own blood AND bring God's justice to the unrepentant on Judgment Day. This is good news for those who have been wronged. Those wrongs will be made right; maybe partially or completely in this life; or through the cross or through Jesus' pronouncements on Judgment Day.

Notice this justice is not only for the Jewish nation. This is for the Gentiles; the nations; people all over the world and through history. This justice is for you and me. No human can come close to delivering that.

So though Jesus came as a Servant and didn't assert Himself publicly and spent time caring for the bruised and flickering of society – He had the power to wipe out His opposition – yet restrained. He has the backing of Almighty God and He has, is and will bring a justice where all wrongs are made right.

I asked you to consider yourself as one attending a candidate's forum for the position of your Savior. Now how does Jesus compare to everyone else clamoring for your attention? How might we respond to Him?

If you're not a Christian, you currently live with spiritual bruising of unforgiven sin. Your eternity hangs in the balance. A blast of disaster, accident or illness could snuff out your life this week and you would be separated from God's saving work forever. But if you come to Jesus to receive His saving work in your life, He will heal your spiritual bruising. It was the will of the Lord to crush or bruise him. Isaiah 53:10. By His wounds you will be healed. You do that by recognizing you've lived your life up to this point in rebellion against Him or apathy towards Him. Then you turn away from that and come to Christ and put the trust of your eternity and your life today upon Him. In that moment of trusting Christ, God forgives you. God applies Jesus' sacrifice to your account and declares you not guilty forever. The flicker of your life will suddenly burn bright with its secure.

For those of us who have already trusted Christ, we need to continue to turn to Christ and trust Him for our daily needs. Life bruises us. Life exhausts us. There are times where our faith may flicker like a candle or life's pressures might threaten to overwhelm us. But Jesus is there. God is there. The Lord is my shepherd. Do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and petition; let your requests be made known to God. But we also have to entrust the answers to God that He knows best.

Then as God restores, strengthens and heals us, we join the universal advance of His kingdom. Maybe He has placed someone in your life like a bruised reed or a flickering candle. He calls you to care for them and bring Christ to them. If you're engaged in some sort of care giving, you are doing God's work. Or maybe He calls you to bring justice to some person or make some wrong right that you have the ability and opportunity to influence.

But God's gentle, compassionate, suffering servant is the key. Jesus will not put Himself forward as a candidate for Messiah. He simply is the Messiah. All the others are pretenders. So let us come to Jesus now; will you then put your

trust In Him for the first time; to receive His ministry and care; or to seek His wisdom and power to continue caring for a bruised and flickering world.