

Matthew 12:15-21*NIV Harmony 69-70; Loyal 99-100***Introduction**

1. Have you ever wanted to get away from a controversy or unjust criticism from others?
 - a. I have experienced what I considered unjust criticism in the past, and it is a painful experience.
 - b. Our human nature is to either fight or flee.
2. In today's lesson, Jesus faced unjust criticism from Jewish leaders.
 - a. Instead of continuing to fight against them, Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the Sea of Galilee.
 - b. The time for continuing the confrontation with the Jewish leaders was not right.
 - c. That time would come in the future, but for now, Jesus still had much ministry and teaching to do.
3. **Read Mt 12:15-21.**

A. The Messianic Secret (15-16)

1. In our last lesson we considered Jesus' controversy with the Jewish leaders over His disciples' picking, threshing with their hands, and eating grain as they walked through the fields on the Sabbath (cf., Mt 12:1-8, Mk 2:23-28; Lk 6:1-5).
 - a. Immediately after that confrontation, the Jewish leaders again confronted Jesus about healing on the Sabbath (cf., Mt 12:9-14; Mk 3:1-6; Lk 6:6-11).
 - b. In both these confrontations, Jesus claimed to be Lord of the Sabbath and the owner of mankind. His essential claim was to be God in flesh who would determine what was most loving and best for humanity.
2. These controversies resulted in an alliance of Jewish leaders against Jesus in a conspiracy among the Pharisees and Herodians to kill him (cf., Mt 12:13, Mk 3:6, Lk 6:11)
 - a. The Pharisees were the self-righteous leaders of the Jews who tried to follow the Law with legalistic obedience.
 - b. The Herodians were Jews who accepted Herod and the Romans as overlords while still hoping for their overthrow by the Messiah in the future.
 - c. These sects of Jews hated one another, but they hated Jesus more.
 - d. As the old sayings state, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend" and "Politics makes strange bedfellows."
 - e. G. Campbell Morgan writes, "When Jesus had said these things the Pharisees determined to destroy Him, for He had claimed to be Lord of the Sabbath, and Owner of man; and to have the royal kingly right to do whatever was pleasing to His heart, impelled by the tenderest love" (G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 127).
3. This brings us to our passage today.
 - a. Matthew's words find a parallel with those of Mark (cf., Mk 3:7-12).
 - b. However, Matthew added important details related to another fulfillment of prophecy regarding Jesus.
4. It was not yet time for Jesus to be killed by the Jewish leaders, so he withdrew from the controversy in unknown synagogue, perhaps the one in Capernaum, (cf., Mt 12:9, Mk 3:1, Lk 6:6) and went to the lake, which was the Sea of Galilee (cf., Mk 3:7).
5. Jesus did not go with just His disciples as "Many followed him, and he healed all their sick" (Mt 12:15). Mark also recorded that "many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon" (Mk 3:8).
 - a. He could get away from the Pharisees and Herodians but not from the throng of people, including the many sick and demon possessed persons, that followed Him.
 - b. Mark recorded that after he healed the sick and cast out demons that "Whenever the evil spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God.' But he gave them strict orders not to tell who he was" (Mk 3:11-12).
 - c. Matthew generalized the warning as one given to all those who followed him as Jesus gave them a "...warning them not to tell who he was." (Mt 12:16).
 - d. This warning was part of the Messianic Secret that we discussed in our journey through Mark.
 - e. The time was not right for Jesus to die, and it was not yet time for His full identity to be revealed.

- f. Warren Wiersbe notes, “The Lord’s withdrawal at this point is an anticipation of His ‘retirement’ described in Matthew 14-20. During that time, Jesus avoided direct conflict with His enemies that He might stay on the ‘divine timetable’ and be crucified on schedule. Also during that time, He taught His disciples and prepared them for His crucifixion” (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Loyal*, 99-100).

B. The Reason for the Messianic Secret (17-21)

1. This is another of Matthew’s statements regarding how Jesus fulfilled OT prophecies.
 - a. Earlier, Matthew had pointed out the fulfillment of prophecy by Jesus in His genealogy (cf., Mt 1:1-17), His virgin birth (cf., Mt 1:22-23), His birth in Bethlehem (cf., Mt 2:5-6), His persecution by Herod (cf., Mt 2:16-18), His announcement by John the Baptist (cf., Mt 3:3), His baptism (cf., Mt 3:17), His preaching (cf., Mt 4:12-17), His healing ministry (cf., Mt 8:17), the divisive nature of His ministry (cf., Mt 10:34-36), John the Baptist’s testimony about Him (cf., Mt 11:7-10), and the fact that He was Lord of the Sabbath (cf., Mt 12:6-8).
 - b. Why was this fulfillment of prophecy such an important part of Matthew’s gospel? I believe it was because Matthew was revealing Jesus as King, the Messiah of prophecy.
2. The reason for Jesus keeping His identity secret at this point according to Matthew was that “This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah...” (Mt. 12:17).
 - a. Matthew then quoted Isaiah 42:1-4 in a Messianic context.
 - b. Craig Blomberg notes, “In some of the suffering servant passages of Isaiah, the prophet explicitly identifies God’s servant as Israel (Isa 44:1; 45:4; 49:3). In other places an individual seems more likely in view (esp. in 52:13-53:12). In Isa 42:1-2 ‘servant’ may signify the nation Israel or the Messiah or the Messiah as the fulfillment of God’s plans for Israel.... Jewish interpretation varied, but already in the *Tg. Isa 42:1*, this text was taken as messianic... Isa 42:1-4 points to what Matthew will have Jesus make increasingly clear: his cross must precede his crown. He comes first to suffer before returning in splendor. His disciples must often follow a similar path (16:24). Still, Christians are not called to quietism and inaction in the face of injustice but to patience, prayer, and a prophetic voice that denounces evil. But they await ultimate vindication from God, to whom alone belongs vengeance and the ability fully to right the wrongs of this world (cf. Jas 5:1-11) (Craig Blomberg, *Matthew* in NAC, 200-201).
3. Jesus was God’s chosen, beloved, Spirit-filled servant (cf., Mt 12:18, Isa 42:1).
 - a. Remember Jesus’ baptism experience and the words of the Father to Him (cf., Mt 3:17) which were also contains echoes of Isa 42:1, “This is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”
 - b. Messiah and Suffering Servant were generally considered to be two different individuals in Jewish theology.
 - c. The fact that God’s plan was for Messiah and the Suffering Servant to be one and the same person was a radical concept.
 - d. This is why the Jewish leaders could not accept Jesus as Messiah. He did not come in the powerful kingly way that they expected. He was a different kind of king. A different kind of leader—a servant leader.
4. Jesus had been sent on a mission of “proclaiming justice to the nations” (Mt 12:18; cf., Isa 42:1,4).
 - a. “justice” (Gk., *krisin* – “judgment” or “justice”) – Jesus came to bring the righteous judgment like that foretold in Isa 11:1-5.
 - b. “to the nations” (Gk., *tois ethnesin*) – Notice that Jesus drew a crowd of not only Jews but also Gentiles. His ministry was to all nations, all people, all of humanity.
5. Jesus would face opposition but would persevere until the victory was won (cf., Mt 19-20; Isa 42:2-4).
 - a. “He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets.”
 - b. Blomberg notes, “The passage in Isaiah predicts that God’s servant will bring justice, but not by force or violence.... ‘No one will hear’ means that few will respond adequately, not that the servant will not speak, though indeed Jesus never persists in arguing or trying to convince those who reject him (cf., vv. 38-42). Matthew may also see here a rejection of the overtly revolutionary or Zealot perspective of his day.” (Blomberg, 200).

- c. Wiersbe notes, “Our Lord’s response to their hatred was withdrawal. He did not openly fight His enemies, but fulfilled the prophecy in Isaiah 42:1-4. His enemies were but broken reeds and smoking flax. Note the double mention of the Gentiles 9 [Mt 12:18,21], another hint from Matthew that Israel would reject her King and the kingdom would go to the Gentiles” (Wiersbe, *Be Loyal*, 99, bracket insertion mine).
 - d. Morgan insightfully adds, “It is generally said that this passage from Isaiah teaches Christ’s meekness, that if a man is bruised He will not break him, and that He will not put out the smoking flax, but that He will help it. But it really teaches Christ’s restraint from judgment during His ministry of grace. He withdrew in order that He might not smite them for their hypocrisy; for a bruised reed is weakness weakened, and smoking flax has the element of destruction in itself, and Christ said of these enemies, they are bruised reeds, they are smoking flax, I cannot break or quench until I send forth judgment to victory, and then the bruised reed will be broken, and the smoking flax fanned into a flame for its own quenching. . . . It is the great King that we see, claiming the Sabbath, claiming the ownership of man, and restraining judgment which might have proceeded in fire against the blasphemers, in order that He may accomplish His work in His own way, and send forth the message of health to the Gentiles also. He restrained judgment because the day of His mercy was not perfected, and accomplished” (Morgan, 128).
 - e. I believe that Jesus was bruised and almost snuffed out on the cross, but He rose again in victory. It is those who reject Him who will be broken and snuffed out in righteous judgment of their rejection of Him.
6. The quote concludes that Jesus will persevere “...till he leads justice (Gk., *krisin*) to victory (Gk., *nikos*).”
- a. Blomberg states, “Verse 20a affirms Jesus’ consummate gentleness . . . The imagery refers to that which could be damaged by the slightest touch . . . Verses 20b-21 promise that he will ultimately bring justice and victory for Gentiles as well as Jewish followers” (Blomberg, 200).
 - b. Note that Gentiles, the nations/islands, are mentioned twice, once at the beginning and again at the end of this passage (cf., Mt 12:18,21; Isa 42:1,4).
 - c. The “nations” or “islands,” as in Isa 42:4, are all the people of the world.
 - d. God’s ultimate plan was to be fulfilled in Jesus, the Messiah Servant, such that “In his name the nations will put their hope” (Mt 12:21, Isa 42:4 use “islands” in place of “nations”).
 - 1) Certainly, those in Galilee and the surrounding Gentile regions were already putting their hope of healing in Jesus.
 - 2) Jesus came to bring a greater healing of spiritual salvation for an even greater region—the whole world.

C. Reflections

1. There is a time to confront and a time to wait. We must follow the Spirit and speak when the time is right according to His leading.
2. We must not yield to controversy and dissent. We must continue to minister in the power of God to those in need as the Lord enables us.
3. We must not be silent and inactive in the face of injustice but must with patience, prayer, and a prophetic voice denounce evil as we await ultimate vindication from God, who alone is our just avenger and the only one able to fully right the wrongs of this world (cf., Blomberg, 201).
4. We must personally receive the justice and victory that Jesus won for us at the cross by placing faith in Him as Savior and Lord of our lives.
5. We must share the truth of who Jesus is and what He has done with all of those who need His salvation from sin today.