

A Bruised Reed

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A theology of preaching begins with the confession that the God who speaks has ultimate claim upon us. He who spoke a word and brought a world into being created us from the dust. God has chosen enlivened dust—and all creation—to bear testimony to His glory.¹

The Prophet Isaiah (739 BC) foretold the characteristics of the coming Messiah several centuries before He was born of a virgin (7:14), which prophecy occurred during the reign of Ahaz (735-716 BC). A few years later, under the reign of Hezekiah (716-687 BC), Isaiah foretold another way to identify the coming Messiah. In this prophetic prophecy of a “bruised reed,” he was under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:19-21). This prophecy is cited by Matthew, one of the Twelve Apostles. Isaiah penned the following words about God’s Messiah: “**a bruised reed**” he will not break, and “**a smoldering wick**” he will not snuff out” (42:3). This unique prophecy of Isaiah gradually unfolds the various events surrounding Christ’s kingdom and His characteristics that will assist us in knowing the distinctiveness of the Messiah in the first century. God’s Messiah would not be a “war lord.” He would not call for a political revolution with a ban of guerilla fighters. During Jesus’ trial, He told Pilate: “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place” (John 18:36; see also Luke 17:20-21).

Chapter 42 of Isaiah is a classic example of the foretelling of Jesus’ demeanor toward us who suffer guilt because of our short comings and of our miserable and gloomy failures in portraying God in our daily walk. Just a little over seven hundred years before God became Incarnate, Isaiah, through the Holy Spirit, revealed the compassion and mercy of the One who would bring justice to the nations—everlasting righteousness. In Chapter 42:1-3, Jesus is declared to be justice to the nations.² Isaiah writes: “He will not shout or cry out, or raise his

¹ R. Albert Mohler Jr., “A Theology of Preaching,” in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 15.

voice in the streets. ³A **bruised reed** he will not break, and a **smoldering wick** he will not snuff out” (Isaiah 42:2-3).²

Isaiah’s prophetic ministry began during the reign of Uzziah (716-740 BC) and concluded with Hezekiah. Between these two kings of Judah, Isaiah mentioned two others—Jotham (750-732 BC) and Ahaz (735-716 BC). During the reign of Hezekiah,³ God gave to Isaiah additional information concerning the Coming One who would redeem lost humanity. Beginning with Chapters 2 and 4 of Isaiah, we are introduced to the establishment of God’s future kingdom (2:2-4), and to the coming of the Messiah (4:2-4), which kingdom and coming would be later developed in greater details through God’s Servant Daniel (Chapters 2, 7, 9). Isaiah’s prophecy during the reign of Hezekiah should cause everyone to shout with joy. God reveals additional information to Isaiah concerning the ministry of the One who would be born of a virgin (7:14). In Jesus’s ministry, He would be reaching out to the downtrodden, the broken, the oppressed, and the demoralized. We are held spellbound by the words: “A **bruised reed** he will not break, and a **smoldering wick** he will not snuff out.”

Matthew, one of the Twelve, wrote about Jesus’ ministry (written, possibly, around the late 50s or early 60s) and, in this disclosure, he presents the citation from Isaiah as applicable to Jesus, which is a direct Messianic prophecy about this Coming One who would restore this lost relationship between Himself and lost humanity (see Matthew 12:15-21). Matthew gives some introductory remarks (12:15-17) and then explains Isaiah’s words as having reference to Jesus Himself (12:18-21). Once more, we should listen carefully to the words of Isaiah; they are words that should bring joy to our hearts as we ourselves struggle in our daily walk with God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

Here is **my servant** [Jesus], 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. ²He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. ³A **bruised reed** he will not break, and a **smoldering wick** he will not snuff out. (Isaiah 42:1-3)

Isaiah, through the Holy Spirit, records this biblical prophecy concerning the demeanor of Jesus in establishing God’s spiritual kingdom, which kingdom would be unique in that Jesus would bring about a spiritual revolution that would change the hearts of men and women. **The following reference by Matthew to Isaiah’s prophecy should awaken within us a feeling of joy, delight, and ecstasy.** He writes:

Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. Many followed him, and he healed all their sick, ¹⁶ **warning them not to tell who he was.** ¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ¹⁸“**Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put**

²I am indebted to Richard Sibbes (1577-1635) for the genesis of my thoughts in the development of this message. He was one of the most influential figures in the Puritan movement during the earlier years of the seventeenth century. He was reprimanded in 1627 and in 1632 along with eleven other Puritan ministers. He was sentenced to banishment, which banishment was never carried out. Nevertheless, he did live to see Samuel Ward, Thomas Goodwin, John Cotton, Thomas Hooker, and others imprisoned or forced into exile in Holland or New England. I highly recommend the following book: Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth, 1630, republished 2011).

³Isaiah 1:1

my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. ¹⁹**He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets.** ²⁰**A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory.** ²¹**In his name the nations will put their hope.**” (Matthew 12:15-21; cited from Isaiah 42:1-4)

What does it mean to us to read that “**He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets**” (12:19)? How do we interpret the following words: “**A bruised reed he will not break**” (12:20a)? Or how do we apply the words: “**A smoldering wick he will not snuff out**” (12:20b)? Have we given sufficient time to reflect upon these heart wrenching words, which language, by the Holy Spirit, conveys comfort to the down-and-out. **These statements should bring calm and relief to our troubled souls.** God calls Christ His servant to bring relief to those who are weary and burdened; He is the One who will uphold God’s justice, and, at the same time, justify sinful humanity.

In this Messianic prophecy, we become conscious that the soul that is about to perish, Jesus will not “break,” but rather, He will make those who are **bruised** and **smoldering** whole again. His love and His healing will go out to the depressed, to the dejected, to the miserable, and to those who are down-in-the-dumps because of their sins. The forecast that Jesus will not “break” or “snuff out” the “bruised reed” or the “smoldering wick” should give comfort to us who are weary and burdened with sins and to us who are shackled and drained, and weighed down with all the rules and regulations from the stringent traditions of our forefathers, which hand-me-down rules and regulations continues to be forced upon us by our religious leaders.

Even the “**smoldering wick,**” that is to say, the wick that is simply emitting a slight smoke, He will rescue and revitalize into a burning wick. He will make the “reed” whole again and the “wick” to burst into flame again if we are willing to repent and accept Jesus as Lord in our lives. He will make our lives to burn brightly once more. **In this Messianic prophecy by Isaiah, we witness the love of God at work in accomplishing redemption for sinful men and women “in” and “through” His Chosen One.** It is in this same vein that Paul seeks to capture God’s part in our redemption, which salvation expresses God’s love for the world. Paul writes his Second Epistle to the Christians in Corinth from Macedonia (about AD 57) to remind them of God’s actions in the Son of Man for our reconciliation. We should read and reflect carefully upon Paul’s words concerning God’s accomplishment in redemption:

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! ¹⁸ **All this is from God,** who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that **God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ,** not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:16-21)

Paul’s comments concerning God’s act toward our redemption is reminiscent of Jesus’ words to Nicodemus: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Just a casual reading of the New Covenant books reveals that all three of the Trinity are involved in our redemption. We should never forget that **the coming of God’s Anointed One through the Virgin Birth**

did not result in the pomp or pageantry that is normally associated with royalty. The Holy Spirit said: “He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets” (Matthew 12:19).

What does **“He will not quarrel or cry out”** mean to us? Or what meaning does “no one will hear his voice in the streets” convey to us? The primary answer to the first statement that He “will not quarrel” is found in Jesus’ confrontation with the Pharisees as reported by Matthew: “Aware of this [rejection by the religious leaders] Jesus withdrew from that place. Many followed him, and he healed all their sick” (12:15). In the first twelve verses of this chapter, we read of an altercation between Jesus and the religious leaders. In other words, His method of the proclamation of the Gospel would not be through violence. Jesus would win the ultimate conflict between Himself and the religious leaders through His meekness, His Death, and His Resurrection.

There is a sense in which Jesus came quietly, not with fanfare, to carry out His mission of redemption. Jesus came as the promised Messiah of the Hebrew Scriptures, but not as the kind of a nationalistic Messiah that would overthrow all nations and bring them under the rule of an earthly dictator appointed by God (see John 18:36)—“no one will hear his voice in the streets.” As we examine the ministry of Jesus, His coming would not be as one born of royalty (noble birth), which royalty would normally associate with those who are accustomed to pomp and pageantry because of their status or elevation in society.

At the birth of Jesus, the known world, as a whole, was not conscious of His position or standing as the Son of God. Yet, the heavenly host was not silent. Luke records that a group of shepherds were approached by an angel, which manifestation revealed that the promised Christ had appeared. They immediately went to Bethlehem and “found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger” (Luke 2:16), not a birth in a great house. Even though Jesus was earthly royalty, the earthly pageantry and fanfare was not present at His birth. Yet, God allowed “a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests’” (2:13). As a result of this miraculous birth, John informs us that God’s “peace” and “favor” would rest upon those who would accept this One as God’s Messiah for the redemption of lost humanity. John later wrote that this One was sent to rescue us from spiritual death in order to give us eternal life (John 3:16-18).

When Herod heard of this birth, he sought to kill the young child and, at the same time, the religious leaders did not respond favorably to the Good News of the birth of God’s promised Messiah (Matthew 2:1-18). What did the people hear from this Servant of God? They heard his call to repentance and the announcement that the kingdom of God was near (Matthew 4:17). Also, His Sermon on the Mount stands out as one of His most confrontational sermons—a rebuke of the religious leaders (Chapters 5—7), not an armed rebellion against them.

Later, Matthew reports another aspect of His preaching, which message reached out to the down-and-out. He reports this encounter between Jesus and the religious leaders in order to give hope and comfort and reassurance to anyone who is a **“bruised reed”** and a **“smoldering wick.”** Prior to citing the prophecy from Isaiah (42:1-3), Matthew gives Jesus’ call to the down-and-out:

Come to me, all you who are **weary** and **burdened**, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ **Take** my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will **find** rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30)

People today are worn down by trials and tribulations in their day-to-day activities. Individuals suffer from all kinds of physical illnesses, loss of loved ones, financial loss, drugs and alcohol problems, anger and hate problems, and so on. One may be a “**bruised reed**” or “**smoldering wick**,” yet, Jesus calls out: “**Come** to me all you who are **weary** and **burdened**, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Many individuals were so hampered and worn out because of all the traditions placed upon them that these individuals felt total despair, misery, and desolation, which is still true today among God’s people (Matthew 12:1-14) .

Isaiah foretold of Jesus’ ministry in Chapter 55:1: “**Come**, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters (see also John 4:1-15)” Jesus’ ministry was modest as well as mild toward the outcast—“A **bruised reed** he will not **break**, and a **smoldering wick** he will not **snuff out**” (Matthew 12: 20). This prophecy included the Gentiles as well as the Jews. When the crowds heard Jesus’ message, they were conscious that His teachings were not the same as they were receiving from their religious leaders. Following Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, Matthew records the reaction of those present: “When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching” (Matthew 7:28).

Are we like giant oak trees or are we like “bruised reeds”? Have we allowed our fire to grow dim or to smolder? Are we like smoldering wicks that emit just smoke? Before and after conversion, we discover that in our struggles in life, we are still “broken reeds” and “smoldering wicks.” When we examine our sins, we witness our true station in life—a life in need of a Savior who offers rest for the weary and discouraged. Are we sensitive and rational concerning our wavering from complete trust in God? Do we long for hope that will allow us to escape our fallen condition? If so, Jesus calls, “**Come** to me, all you who are **weary** and **burdened**, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

How should we read the following eight stories of “bruised reeds”? One objective of this study is to assist the readers to enter into the spirit of the events as revealed to us in the Scriptures and not to impoverish ourselves by remaining outside of the stories told. To help us get the most out of the following stories, I call attention to Leland Ryken’s need to be an active participant as we enter into the various stories and to identify ourselves in the same predicament—“bruised reeds”:

The Need to Be an Active Reader

To read stories well, then, we need to be active—in visualizing, in imagining scenes, in **entering into the spirit of events**, in **identifying with characters**. One sure way to impoverish our experience of a biblical story is to remain outside of the action, as though we were simply being told a series of facts. Personal involvement, achieved by an active use of the imagination, is the first requirement for reading biblical narrative. The stories of the Bible demand the answering imagination of the reader for their effect. Rule number one for reading the stories of the Bible is simply this: *look upon biblical stories as an invitation to share an experience, as vividly and concretely as possible, with the characters in the story.*⁴ (Emphasis mine—underlining and bold)

⁴ Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature: . . . and Get More out of It* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2016). 34.

THE PRODIGAL SON: A BRUISED REED AND A SMOLDERING WICK

Luke 15:17-24

Are we like the prodigal son in the parable that Jesus told in order to exhibit God's love for the badly-behaved and strong-minded sinners as recorded by Luke? Have we departed from God because of our desire for the things of the world? Are we **weak** or **bruised** in our relationship with God because of sickness, growing old with physical problems, or loss of a loved one through death. If so, God is able to heal! Are we **downhearted** or **discouraged**? If so, Jesus is our answer. He will heal! He will give rest! If we wish to take advantage of Jesus' tenderness, we need to humble ourselves and rest upon His mercy, not our works. In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, He speaks of those as blessed who are bankrupt in spirit (Matthew 5:3). If we become "poor" in spirit, we will "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (5:6).

This mind-set of bankruptness will lead us to reach out to God's compassion and mercy. Even when we discover our true status before God as "**bruised reeds**" and "**smoldering wicks**," this realization will result in leveling our pride, our high thoughts, and the true condition of our souls. Once we realize that we really are "**bruised reeds**" and "**smoldering wicks**," we will have the attitude of the so-called prodigal son as found in Luke's Gospel. Listen to Jesus as he illustrates how He is willing to heal a "broken reed":

When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.' (Luke 15:17-24)

This parable by Jesus is an excellent example of a "**bruised reed**" that turns to God for mercy. Until we come to the fact that we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory, we will not turn to Jesus who heals (Romans 3:21-26). A consciousness of our true status before God will make us put a high price on God's scheme of redemption "in" and "through" Jesus. When we come to an accurate understanding of our sinful state ("**bruised reeds**"), then we will endeavor to put into practice the words of Paul in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians (written about AD 57 from Macedonia): "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). With this kind of outlook, we will experience God's healing power and the purging power of His Gospel.

THE HUMBLER TAX COLLECTOR: A BRUISED REED AND A SMOLDERING WICK

Luke 18:9-14

Once more, Luke records another parable of Jesus that goes to the very core of arrogance as demonstrated by the Pharisee, and, on the other hand, the humility of the **tax collector** who **realized that he was a “bruised reed” as well as a “smoldering wick.”** Where do we stand in relationship to this parable? Even after our acceptance of Jesus as Lord in our lives, we still need to remember that we are still “**bruised reeds.**” We still struggle with our frailties and thrash about with our sins; we still need healing from our bruises and our smoldering wicks, that is to say, healing by the curative powers of Christ’s finished work on Calvary. This story illustrates that the “bruised reed” attitude displayed by the tax collector should also be our attitude of humility. We should also keep our minds on this parable by Jesus as He seeks to drive home the point that He will not break a “bruised reed” or “snuff out” a smoldering wick:

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.” ¹¹ The **Pharisee** stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ ¹³ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ ¹⁴ I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:9-14).

PETER: A BRUISED REED AND A SMOLDERING WICK

Matthew 26:33, 75; Mark 16:7

Peter, one of the Twelve, is a case in point of a “**bruised reed.**” As Christians, we need to remind ourselves that we are not massive oak trees. With Peter’s denial of the Master, he went out and “wept bitterly” (Matthew 26:75). Prior to this incident, he was filled with pride and confidence: “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will” (26:33). We are all “**bruised reeds**” and “**smoldering wicks.**” Surely, Peter must have felt his failure as a—“**bruised reed.**” Mark reports a conversation between an angel and some women who went to the tomb of Jesus on the morning of Jesus’ Resurrection. What is significant, in my mind, is a statement made by the angel to the women: “Go tell his disciples and Peter, He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you” (Mark 16:7).

Was not Peter one of His disciples? Why was he singled out? Go tell my disciples and tell Peter also. Apparently, Peter was downcast, but Jesus would not break him. We know from Luke that Jesus appeared to Peter on the day of His Resurrection on a one-on-one basis (Luke 24:33). It is in this same vein that Paul warned the Christians in the province of Galatia not to be too pompous about their own strength: “**Brothers,** if someone is caught in a sin, you who are

spiritual should restore him gently. But **watch yourself**, or you also may be tempted” (Galatians 6:1).

**DAVID:
A BRUISED REED AND A SMOLDERING WICK**

Psalm 32:3-5; 51:1-19

God’s former worthies should awaken us to reflect upon our own spiritual strength. One of these former worthies is none other than David, the king of Israel. He himself was also a prophet of God (see Acts 1:16; 2:30; 2 Samuel 23:1-2). As we consider the great deeds and the failures of so many noble servants of God, we can find comfort and assurance of God’s love. In spite of their short comings as well as ours, we still see God’s love extended to them and to us with our short comings and our bruises. **David**, king of Israel (reigned from 1010-979 BC), committed adultery and tried to hide his sin. He tells us about his cover up as he reflected upon his own bruises:

When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledge my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord—and you forgave the guilt of my sin.’ (Psalm 32:3-5)

David remembered that he himself was a “**bruised reed**”—a man with crushed bones. In another one of his psalms, he pleads for mercy. He pours out his heart to God for healing: “Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice” (51:8). God did not destroy this broken reed, but rather He healed him in love. How do we react to our sins? Are we filled with pride or are we filled with a broken spirit of humility? **David** expresses the spirit of an unassuming nature this way: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (51:17).

The words of Jesus should ring loud and clear in our broken and smoldering lives: “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). If we have a drug problem or an alcohol problem, or anger problem, we need to turn to Him who will not break but forgive us. Again, we need to recollect the words of John, one of Jesus’ Twelve, who penned the following words about sin and confession:

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:1-2)

**HEZEKIAH:
A BRUISED REED AND A SMOLDERING WICK**

Isaiah 38:13; 39:1-8

We do not know why God sent Isaiah to Hezekiah to tell him that he was about to die. Yet we are told that he needed to get his house in order (Isaiah 38:1). Was it because of pride (see 39:1-8). Whatever happened in his life, he came to realization that he himself was a bruised reed. **Hezekiah** expressed his predicament when Isaiah informed him that he was about to die. He cried out in anguish: “I waited patiently till dawn, but like a lion he broke all my bones; day and night you made an end of me” (Isaiah 38:13). In other words, God took the sails out of him.

We may think we do not need God until some tragedy occurs in our lives. **Paul**, too, had to be taken down a notch or two to curb any thought of pride because of his unique revelation of the unseen world: “To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me” (2 Corinthians 12: 7).

**SINFUL WOMAN WHO ANOINTED JESUS:
A BRUISED REED AND A SMOLDERING WICK**

Luke 7:36-50

A Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus to a dinner (Luke 7:36). During the course of the meal, as they reclined at the table, a woman who had lived a sinful life went to this home following her knowledge that Jesus was eating at Simon’s home. Luke gives the touching scene of this woman who was a “**bruised reed**” and a “**smoldering wick.**” As he relates this story, he reports the words of Jesus as well as the thoughts of Simon:

When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume,³⁸ and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.³⁹ When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.” (7:37-39)

The rest of the story, in its entirety, is found in 7:40-50. In spite of the negative criticism of the Pharisee, Jesus simply looked at the woman and said, “Your sins are forgiven” (7:48). Once again, Jesus gazed at this woman and said, “Your faith has saved you, go in peace” (7:50). She was a “**bruised reed!**” Simon was shocked at this kind of forgiveness on the part of his guest. Jesus responded to Simon by saying, “Her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little” (7:47). Jesus had compassion for the weak and the crushed.

WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY: A BRUISED REED AND A SMOLDERING WICK

John 8:1-11

John, one of the Twelve, tells the story of a woman caught in adultery. This time, we witness the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees conducting this clandestine confrontation with Jesus over the Law of Moses and His reaction to her sin (8:3-4). They sought to entrap Him with their question as to whether or not to stone her. This group continued to barrage Him with questions when He sought to avoid their hypocrisy. Finally, Jesus responded by saying, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her” (8:7).

Again, Jesus sought to avoid a direct response and stooped down on the ground and wrote as if He had paid no attention to their questioning (8:8). When the questions continued from the hypocrites, He arose and asked a piercing question concerning their sinfulness (8:7). As a result of Jesus’ questioning them about their own immorality, they all left one by one (8:9). They all departed from the scene, except Jesus and the woman. Ultimately, Jesus responded to the woman by inquiring if anyone had condemned her. She replied with a NO! Then Jesus told her: “Neither do I condemn you” (8:11). She was then told, “Go now and leave your life of sin.” Once again, we see the prophecy of Isaiah fulfilled in the life of this woman.

CRIMINAL ON THE CROSS: A BRUISED REED AND A SMOLDERING WICK

Luke 23:39-43

Even when Christ hung upon the Cross, He responded to a “**bruised reed**” that also hung upon another cross for his own personal life of criminal behavior. This story is found in Luke’s Gospel. One of the two criminals hurled insults at Him: “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us” (23:39). On the other hand, one of the criminals rebuked the other unrepentant criminal who railed out against the Christ. In his rebuke, he requested that Jesus would remember him when He would come into His kingdom (23:40-42). Again, we see Jesus as He dealt with another “**bruised reed**.” We should listen with open ears to Jesus as he spoke to him of forgiveness: “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise” (23:43).

JESUS DIED FOR: BRUISED REEDS AND SMOLDERING WICKS

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. ⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:4-6)

Jesus died for us because we are all “**bruised reeds**” and “**smoldering wicks.**” He “took up our infirmities” and “was pierced for our transgressions” in order that He could rescue us who are “**bruised reeds**” and “**smoldering wicks.**” God allowed Jesus to die for us so that He would not have to break us as “**bruised reeds**” and “**smoldering wicks**” (see 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 2:5-18). Without Jesus’ Atonement, we could not be healed from our sins. What is God’s remedy for **bruised reeds** and **smoldering wicks**? The answer is none other than Jesus Himself who is God’s Anointed One. Over seven hundred years before Jesus confirmed God’s remedy upon the Cross, Isaiah, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, penned these words: “But he was **pierced** for our transgressions, he was **crushed** for our iniquities; the **punishment** that brought us peace was upon him, and by his **wounds** we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). Even upon the Cross, He still prayed to the Father for those who nailed Him to the Tree. Luke gives introductory remarks leading up to Jesus’ words upon the Cross:

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed.³³ When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left.³⁴ Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. (Luke 23:32-34)

CONCLUSION

The stories and poems of the Bible achieve their devotional purpose whenever they reinforce a reader’s general sense of the reality of God, or produce an awareness of what is moral and immoral, or influence a person’s estimate of what is valuable and worthless. We are affected by more than ideas when we read literature, though, of course, ideas are part of the total experience. We read literature not primarily to acquire information but to contemplate experience and reality as a way of understanding them better. **One of the rewards of reading literature, including the Bible, is that our own experiences and beliefs are given shape and expression**⁵ (Emphasis mine-bold)

Are we conscious that we, too, are “**bruised reeds**” and “**smoldering wicks**”? Do we reach out to God’s children who are suffering from physical and spiritual problems? Do we sit in wonder and awe and surprise that the Holy Spirit had Isaiah to write those powerful words concerning the Coming Messiah? Have we consciously reflected upon Jesus’ call to **come to Him** (Matthew 11:28-30)? Have we pondered over Matthew’s account of “Jesus” as God’s Servant (12:15-21)? How do we react to the following who were “**bruised reeds**” and “**smoldering wicks**”: the prodigal son, the tax collector, the Apostle Peter, King David, King Hezekiah, the sinful woman who anointed Jesus, the adulterous woman caught in the act, the criminal on the cross next to Jesus who sought forgiveness? Have we reflected upon Jesus who was crushed for our sins because of feebleness? Hopefully, Jesus’ sacrifice will fill us with comfort and reassurance and joy about our salvation—a salvation that is by grace “in” and “through” the finished work of Christ upon the Cross of Calvary. We should pray that God will help us to never forget the words of the Holy Spirit to Isaiah:

⁵ Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature: . . . and Get More out of It* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2016), 22.

Here is my servant [Jesus], 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 [Gentiles]. ²He 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. (Isaiah 42:1-3)

Isaiah 42:1-3 makes known to us our condition and Isaiah 53:4-6 enlightens us as to how God would accomplish what he had promised earlier (42:1-3). Paul describes to the Christians in Rome how God had fulfill what He had asserted in 42:1-3 “in” and “through” Jesus:

But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²²**This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.** There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵**God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement,** through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—²⁶he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:21-26; see also 1 Corinthians 1:18-31).