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Sermon Notes

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The Forceful Advance of Christ's Delightful Gentleness

Matthew 12:15-21

I. How Ordinary Kings Build an Empire

A. 20th Century a Time for Street-Level Rabble-Rousers

- Benito Mussolini whipped up his black-shirted fascists to march on Rome
- Vladimir Lenin was exceptionally adept at the clenched-fist street harague to whip up the crowd into a revolutionary frenzy
- Adolph Hitler did one thing better than anyone else: he captured the post-WWI rage and aspirations of most Germans in rabble-rousing orations... sometimes lasting 2 ½ hours, reaching a frenzied climax of passion, the crowd was whipped up like a frothy sea into a tidal wave of overpowering force
- Mao Zedong also had this power... the ability to stand in front of a sea of common people and move them to action, move them to anger, mover them to irrational conquest, move them to revolution

All of these 20th century Kings built their empires the same way... by raising their voices in the streets, tapping into the repressed and selfish rage of most common people, and moving them to do violence on their behalf

This is how you build an empire if you are a 20th century self-worshipping demagogue

This is NOT how Christ built His kingdom!

Oh, He could have done this! The zealots were poised and ready to topple Rome... the hatred for Rome was so potent that it would bubble over into open revolt forty years later.

But **seven centuries before Christ**, Isaiah spoke of a different kind of King... the Servant of the Lord

His Kingdom would spread from shore to shore, advancing irresistibly... but it would advance behind a peace-loving, gentle, humble, servant-ruler... of whom God the Father said

"Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put 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."

Basic concept: Christ has enemies who want to kill Him. Rather than confront them with violence, He retreats. As He does so the weak and rejected come to Him and He heals them. This is how the King will conquer the world: not with passionate harangues whipping the multitude up into a frenzy, but with astounding humility, welcoming the weakest rejects and proclaiming truth to them. And He will succeed, because in the end even the most distant Gentiles will trust in His name.

II. Context: Enemies Plotting His Destruction

A. Matthew 11-12: Human Responses to the Advancing Kingdom

1. Matthew 11: John the Baptist's Doubts
2. Matthew 11:20-24 Korazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum... unbelief leading to indifference
3. Matthew 11:25-30 Sovereignty of God, Gentle Appeal of the King
4. Matthew 12:1-14 Trouble over the Sabbath: The Religionists Attack

Matthew 12:14 But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

- a. careful conspiracy to end his life
- b. Jesus well aware of what they were plotting
- c. earthly King would have gone on the attack

B. Jesus' Gentle Response

vs. 15 Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place.

1. Typical of the humble servanthood of Jesus
 - a. lived only to do the will of His Father
 - b. not seeking glory for Himself

John 8:50 I am not seeking glory for myself

2. Not seeking to press His Kingdom ahead by force

a. most empire builders, when confronted with opposition, go on the attack

Illus. Napoleon, never let his enemies get comfortable... would attack usually much earlier than they were expecting

b. Christ is so different... consistently withdraws in the face of opposition

Matthew 4:12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee

Matthew 14:13 When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.

John 8:59 At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

John 12:36 When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

c. Christ also withdrew in the face of surging human adulation

After He had fed the 5000

John 6:15 Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

d. evidence of this withdrawing, hiding approach is found in His repeated commands not to spread news about His miracles

vs. 15-16 Many followed him, and he healed all their sick, 16 warning them not to tell who he was.

Christ did not desire to build a populist movement based on swelling human emotions... Christ was not a street rabble-rouser, nor some common insurrectionist

Not one of those people understood who He truly was

C. Clearing Away Misconceptions

1. Christ did not withdraw out of fear

On the contrary: when the time came for His arrest, He went out to meet the small army that came to get him with torches, lanterns and weapons

2. Christ did not withdraw out of weakness, a lack of power to deal with His enemies

On the contrary, the night they arrested Him He merely spoke His name and the soldiers fell over backwards; on that same night He told Peter that He could call on His Father and at once have more than twelve legions of angels

Julius Caesar conquered Europe with eleven legions of men; Christ could have had MORE THAN twelve legions, not of men but of angels put at his immediate disposal; in the Book of Revelation, chapter 9, three angels poured out plagues on the earth killing one third of all of the earth's population. Just three angels!

No, it was not out of weakness or lack of power: Christ had in Himself enough power to destroy the entire earth; He had in one angel also enough power to do it

3. Christ did not withdraw because He did not want to be King

Christ did want to be a King, and in fact He IS the King of the Kingdom of Heaven:

John 18:37 "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

Jesus withdrew because His Kingdom would be built another way:

- 1) With His willingness not to shed His enemies blood... whether the blood of Roman soldiers or of corrupt Jewish leaders, but to allow those Roman and Jewish enemies to shed His blood on the cross
- 2) With astounding gentleness to the weakest, lowliest, and neediest people... not just the physically sick He heals here, but the spiritually sick He heals from all over the earth

This combination of humble servanthood unto death, and irresistible gentleness has built the greatest empire in the history of the world

This is what Matthew celebrates with a remarkable quote from Isaiah

III. Isaiah's Astonishing Portrait of Our King

vs. 17-21 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 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."

Note: Isaiah's visions the foundation of Matthew's proof of fulfillment

vs. 17 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah

Six times Matthew quotes Isaiah, showing how Christ fulfilled Isaiah's prophecies... Christ's entire ministry was prophesied six centuries before He was born. To Matthew, this was great evidence of the deity of Christ, and of His claim to be King of the Kingdom of Heaven.

A. Christ's Calling by God

vs. 18 "[Behold] my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight..."

NOTE: NIV leaves out "Behold..." But it is vital to understand how much God the Father wants to put His Son on display. "Look, behold, gaze at Him, people from every tribe and language and people and nation!!!"

God the Father is not shy about putting His Son on display!

BEHOLD...!!!!

1. The Servant of the Lord

- a. the most difficult of Isaiah's vision for Jesus' contemporaries to accept
- b. the "Suffering Servant" of Isaiah

Isaiah 52:13-53:6 [Behold], my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. 14 Just as there were many who were appalled at him--his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness-- 15 so will he sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand. Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? 2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. 4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. 5 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. 6 We 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 53:11 After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

So confusing was this to the Jews, they had no real idea who this could be. It certainly couldn't be the Messiah, who will triumph and be incredibly victorious over all the Gentile oppressors of Israel. All the Jewish leaders and people were waiting for a Messiah who would triumph and be victorious! What they could never understand was a Messiah who would triumph by suffering! Triumph through humility. Triumph through ministering to the weakest, sickest, lowliest people whom no one wanted! Triumph by dying, by shedding His blood

This was the Suffering Servant... and the Jews had no category for Him

For this reason, the Ethiopian eunuch was deeply distressed and puzzled when reading about Him

- c. Christ came to be the "Servant of the Lord"... to put Himself totally at God's disposal, even to the point of death

Matthew 20:28 ... the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

John 6:38-39 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

Philippians 2:5-8 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

2. Chosen

- a. Christ was chosen specifically by God for this role
- b. Christ is the "elect", the "chosen one of God"
- c. God chose to work through His Son, and through no other

Greek: Word for "chosen" here is unusual; it means irrevocably choosing someone for a special role... frequently used of adoption. Christ is specially chosen by God to be His Servant to save us

God chose Christ before the foundation of the world to die on the cross for our sins

1 Peter 1:18-20 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. 20 He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

Christ was also chosen by God to be the foundation of the spiritual temple He is building:

1 Peter 2:4-6 As you come to him, the living Stone-- rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

Christ is the chosen servant of God!!

3. Beloved and Delightful to God

KJV Matthew 12:18 Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased

Very strong language of intense love... "my soul delights in Him!!!"

- a. Christ was beloved by His Father, and the love the Father has for the Son is what saves us too
- b. the Father's love for the Son comes from the fact that the Son is perfect in every way and is delightful to Him

Matthew 3:16-17 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Matthew 17:5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

John 3:35 The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands.

John 5:20 For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does.

John 10:17 The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life-- only to take it up again.

- The Father loves the Son because the Son is a perfect representation of His own nature
- The Father loves the Son because the Son was His co-laborer in crafting the universe
- The Father loves the Son because the Son is zealous for His glory above all things
- The Father loves the Son because the Son would rather die than disobey His Father

Jonathan Edwards: "The infinite happiness of the Father consists in the enjoyment of the Son!"

The Father loves the Son with an everlasting and infinite love, a love so intense it burns with eternal glory and radiance, stronger than a trillion suns.

It is in the raging furnace of passion that the Father has for the Son that we find our salvation:

Ephesians 1:4-6 In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

KJV: "accepted in the beloved!!"

God accepts us in the one He loves above all else... Christ! He sees us IN CHRIST, and thus we are as beloved as Christ is...

John 17:22-26 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. 24 "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. 25 "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. 26 I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

Our salvation is totally wrapped up in the fact that Christ, the Suffering Servant of the Lord, is delightful and beloved by His Father!!

vs. 18 "[Behold] my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight..."

Summary: Christ's mission was to be the Suffering Servant of the Lord... chosen, delightful because He is willing to die to bring about the Father's perfect will. What is His will? To save sinners like us!!

B. Christ's Conduct of that Calling

vs. 18 I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations.

1. Positively: a Spirit-empowered, enduring proclamation of justice to the nations

a. Spirit-filled

Christ was saturated with the Holy Spirit...

- conceived by the Spirit in Mary's womb;
- lighted upon by the Spirit as a dove at His baptism;
- led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted;
- led by the Spirit out of the desert to preach;
- proclaiming the Spirit was upon Him in His first preaching at Nazareth;
- empowered by the Spirit to do signs and wonders;
- filled with the Spirit to proclaim the Kingdom in Israel;
- led by the Spirit to death on the cross;
- raised by the Spirit from the dead

b. proclamation of justice

The quote from Isaiah focuses on the Spirit-empowered proclamation by the Spirit of justice to the nations

vs. 18 I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations.

Stunningly disappointing to Jews... they didn't want a "proclamation of justice to the Gentiles"... they wanted a "sword of revenge"... justice meted out by violence!!!

BUT Christ's Kingdom will advance not by the sword but by preaching!!!

This prophecy goes right to the end of the world... Christ will proclaim justice in two senses:

- 1) The gift of righteousness from God in the gospel for those who hope in the Son
- 2) The threat of righteousness of God in wrath-filled judgment on the world that rejects the Son

c. to the nations

The scope of Christ's proclamation ministry is the "nations" = Gentiles

This could only have been fulfilled by the church after Pentecost, because Christ was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel

Thus on the day of Pentecost, Christ Himself poured out His Spirit to finish this mandate from Isaiah

Acts 1:8 "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

d. patient endurance to the end

The "ends of the earth" are in view in this prophecy from Isaiah:

Isaiah 42:1,4 "Here is my servant, 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.

4 he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope."

The "islands" represent the most distant portions of the earth, and they are part of Christ's possession

Psalm 2:8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.

Christ will keep at His patient, gentle, consistent, Spirit-filled proclamation of justice until the distant islands hear His message and trust in Him

Christ also "proclaims justice" because He is the King of the world... as King, He metes out justice to everyone on earth

Isaiah 2:3 The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

In the end, Christ's Kingdom will be world-wide... even though He will not lift a single sword to accomplish this slow, steady advance

And He will not falter or be discouraged in any way until the end is accomplished

2. Negatively: not a harsh rabble-rouser, trampling or discarding people

a. not a street-level rabble-rouser

vs. 19 He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets.

- Twentieth-century tyrants renowned for their street-level preaching, their inciting of popular movements and mass riots

- Jesus Christ could easily have done the same thing... the time was ripe for revolution against the Romans... the Zealots were ready to take up swords for the establishment of a Jewish Kingdom
- Jesus certainly raised His voice in the streets... but only in the proclamation of the gospel of peace:

John 7:37 On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink."

- Jesus raised His voice to bring Lazarus from the tomb

John 11:43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

- Jesus also raised His voice in public one other occasion:

Mark 15:34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"-- which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Luke 23:46 Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

Thus Jesus raised His voice to preach the Gospel... He raised His voice to resurrect the dead... He raised His voice on the cross under the wrath of God

But He didn't raise His voice to whip up a rabble into revolution

b. not a harsh and crushing tyrant, discarding useless people

vs. 20 A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out

Most revolutionaries have no use for the weak and helpless... they want angry men with the power of youth and the rage of dissatisfaction to build a mighty army to change the world

The weak get trampled by tyrants like that!!

Each of the Twentieth-century dictators I mentioned above were ruthless men who assassinated people to keep their movements going

Not so, this King

He is "gentle and humble in heart"...

vs. 20 A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out

A bruised reed is one bent over and seemingly useless

A smoldering wick is one that's just about extinguished, giving off smoke and very little light

Both are considered close to worthless... but Jesus takes the sick, the dying, the outcasts, the worthless... and conquers the world with them!!! But through a gentle humble advance

C. Christ's Consummation of that Calling

vs. 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."

1. Victory: He will lead justice to victory
2. Worldwide Kingdom: In His name (Law) the Islands will put their hope

In the end, Christ's Kingdom will conquer all

He will not falter or be discouraged until He has succeeded in His worldwide mission

Justice will triumph... the distant islands will trust in His name

"Name" = the name of Jesus Christ

Romans 10:13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Christ's name will be the hope of people from every nation on earth!!!

IV. Application

A. Let the Servant of God Serve YOU

It's very humbling to have Jesus get down on His knees and wash your feet!!

It's even more humbling to admit what a sinner you are and how much you need Him to be your Savior EVERY DAY!!!

His healings are a picture of His willingness to serve repulsive people... lepers, demon-possessed, blind, lame... these are ugly to look at, repulsive in every way

BUT CHRIST accepts them into His Kingdom, then transforms them into what God intends them to be

Lose your pride and let Christ be your servant... to cleanse you from sin and bring you safely into heaven

B. Let the Servant of the Lord be your role model

The Kingdom does not advance by pride, power, might, human talent & skill

It advances by God's Spirit

Don't be a worldly empire-builder... be a servant

Be willing to associate with the poor, needy, lowly

Get involved in our inner city ministry or our international ministry

Be humble in how you deal with your family, friends, and co-workers

C. Be Not Intimidated nor Impressed by Earthly Rabble-rousers

Their kingdoms certainly look impressive as they swell to great heights

But where is Leninist Russia now?

What happened to Hitler's Thousand-year Reich?

What of Saddam Hussein's New Babylon?

The true and eternal Kingdom is proceeding quietly and irresistibly by peaceful means

D. Limit your patriotism

America is a wonderful country and many of its people and leader are Christians

However, America and the Kingdom of Christ are two different things

As we rightly support our President and pray for the success of our troops, we do so with an eye to the Kingdom that Christ is building by peaceful means... not by M1A1 Abrams tanks, total air supremacy, cruise missiles and Marines

E. Pray for the Islands to put their trust in Christ... Christ's Kingdom is destined to spread to the ends of the earth

Next week... "Bruised reed and smoldering wick"