

"Handle With Care"
Matthew 12:14-21
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Have you ever received or sent a package labeled "Fragile: Handle with Care?" It might be a very expensive crystal vase, or maybe just a small toy, but the purpose is to warn the friendly UPS or Postal Service employee that if they are not careful how they handle the package, what is inside may be damaged.

Folks, sometimes I think I should wear the same label: "Fragile: Handle with Care." No, I am not worried someone is going to squeeze me too hard or drop me on the ground, but I know on the inside I can sometimes be fragile. No, I am not usually on the verge of tears, and I don't feel devastated when someone at the grocery store just says, "Hi," but doesn't stop to talk with me. Yet, I have taken some rides on the emotional roller coaster.

Oh, I usually don't let anyone know that. After all I am a guy. But it has happened. I might be having a fine day, but then someone says something that seems critical of me and if I am not careful, I slide into an emotional ditch. Can you relate?

The Bible is right when it says the tongue is a dangerous weapon, and I know a careless word on my part can make it a lousy day for someone else. It might be good if people had the words: "Fragile: Handle with Care" stamped on their foreheads to remind us how easily we can hurt one another.

Being emotionally fragile is not our only problem, however. Most Christians, at least the ones I know, are kind of spiritually fragile. It is not that we might give up the faith tomorrow and become atheists, but we find it sometimes is a struggle to consistently follow the Lord. All too often we end up on a spiritual roller coaster. At least that has happened to me. And I know it happened to great Christian leaders like Martin Luther, Jon Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, Francis Schaeffer and Billy Graham. And when we read Romans 7, we learn it happened to the Apostle Paul.

Oh, some Christians pretend they are always on top of things, but if we are really honest, I suspect every one of us knows we are not batting a thousand. We are not even close to perfect.

Maybe we are usually okay, but there are occasions when we strike out big time. Like Christian, the character in Bunyan's "Pilgrims Progress" we too have to deal with things like "the slough of despondency," "doubting castle" and "the giant of discouragement" as we seek to follow the Lord.

Oh, some of us do better than others. Maybe you have been a Christian for many years and have learned to avoid some of the ditches and valleys. But I am afraid you still have a somewhat fragile soul. Yes, your eternal salvation is secure because of Jesus Christ, but when it comes to following the Lord each day, you desperately need God's grace and help.

When we start to think we don't, that we can do fine on our own, we make ourselves even more vulnerable to attacks from the enemies of our soul, the world, the flesh, and the devil. The reality is, being a Christian and following Jesus is often anything but easy.

That is why our text today is very encouraging. We return this morning to our journey through the book of Matthew, the first book in the New Testament. We resume where we left off seven months ago and will be exploring chapter 12:14-21. This paragraph contains what I think is one of the most comforting verses in the Bible, **Matthew 12:20 A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory.** Let's pause and pray the Lord would enable us to understand what this verse means and that we would find great encouragement in His word today.

Our text makes clear that Jesus is the *service* Messiah. The previous episode in Matthew 12 is the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees concerning the Sabbath. After Jesus healed a man on a Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, verse 14 says **Matthew 12:14 But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.** In response **Matthew 12:15, 16 Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all and ordered them**

not to make him known. In other words, reveal who He was.

Rather than fight the Pharisees on their turf, Jesus continued in the service ministry to which God had called Him. Even though it is becoming clear to many that Jesus is not an ordinary man, He does not want that news released prematurely. Then **Matthew** says **12:17 This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah:** Jesus' actions continue to demonstrate that He is the Messiah, the anointed Savior God promised to Israel hundreds of years earlier.

Then Matthew gives us a quote from Isaiah 42:1-4. These verses describe the service Messiah God would one day send to His people they are marvelous verses for us. **Isaiah 12:18-21 "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. He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; and in his name the Gentiles will hope."**

Matthew says it is now clear. Jesus is the Messiah God promised. One of the great themes of the Old Testament is that God will not forget His people but promises to deliver them through the Messiah. In Jesus' day, many hoped this Messiah would come and get rid of Roman government that had been oppressing them for years. They focused on the Old Testament passages about the Messiah being a Savior and deliverer. Maybe they had those verses underlined in their scrolls.

But they often ignored passages like Isaiah 42, that described the Messiah as a servant, or Isaiah 53 which portrayed Him as the suffering servant. Matthew shows that Jesus is fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies more clearly than most folks realized. His passion for justice, combined with gentleness and humility, is exactly what Isaiah said the Messiah would be like. If we take an objective look at all the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament and compare them with Jesus' life and ministry recorded for us in the New Testament gospels, the inescapable conclusion is that Jesus is the Messiah, the one whom God has chosen and anointed as Savior and Lord.

And contained in those words Matthew quotes from Isaiah, is some great news for us who are Christian believers. It lets us know that Jesus, our Savior and Lord, will handle us with care. This passage gives us a vivid description of the character of the Messiah. Because, as Hebrews 13:8 says Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever, this also describes the Lord Jesus today.

For those of us with kind of fragile souls, for those of us who sometimes struggle with living Christian lives and doing the right thing there are few verses as comforting as **Matthew 12:20 A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench.** A bruised reed is like a little stick, maybe one with a crack in it. Jesus is very careful that He does not break it. The smoldering wick is either poorly made or low on oil, but Jesus is very careful that He does not put out the fire.

Yet, neither Isaiah nor Matthew are talking about sticks or lamps. They are talking about people. Weak people, fragile people. It included the many physically sick whom Jesus had great compassion on and healed. It also included those with perfectly healthy bodies, but with troubled souls who are described as "harassed and helpless" in Matthew 9:36 and the "weary and heavy burdened" in Matthew 11:28.

Jesus has compassion on these types of people. He treats them with great gentleness. It is almost as if the words, "Fragile: Handle with Care" are stamped on their souls, because that is what Jesus does. He is very careful not to break the bruised reed or quench the smoldering wick.

As we go through the gospel of Matthew, we see many dimensions of the person of Jesus Christ. He doesn't fit easily into our categories. He is not afraid to challenge the religious and political establishment. He confronts hypocrisy and wickedness wherever He finds it. He gives blunt warning about God's wrath and eternal hell to those who reject Him. His teaching is full of authority. His power over both the physical and spiritual realms is amazing.

Yet, underlying all this is a great compassion, a great love, that is beyond what any of us can comprehend, people today need to be reminded

that Jesus is King of Kings who will one day judge and rule the world. We need to realize He is Lord of Lords who tolerates no competitors. Yet, we must never forget He is the one who will not break the bruise reed or quench the smoldering wick.

Friends, if you are not a Christian, not a believer in Jesus, I hope you are starting to realize what a wonderful person Jesus is. If, as God enables, you stop trusting in yourself, and receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord, you will experience that grace and compassion in your life. If you are not doing that, please turn to the Lord Jesus today. If you are not sure what that means, or have any other questions, let's chat later.

I want to focus, however, on a couple of practical lessons this text has for those of us who are believers in Jesus.

First, it teaches us that struggling Christians should not give up. Many Christians struggle at times and find themselves on that spiritual roller coaster. Some struggle more than others, but none of us are immune from those attacks by the world, the flesh and the devil. And often we are just a few steps away from falling into a spiritual pit. Even very devout Christians sometimes ride spiritual roller coasters, where one day they feel totally committed to following the Lord, and the next day God is far away from their thoughts.

For example, maybe on Sunday morning your heart is just overflowing with adoration for the Lord as you sing songs of praise. But on the way home from church, the kids start fighting in the car and before you know it, you have lost your temper, and all the joy is gone.

Or your New Year's resolution was, "I am going to read one chapter in the Bible every day. But Friday morning, instead of picking up your Bible, you turned on ESPN to catch up on Thursday's football games and soon the day was over, and you had not opened your Bible.

Or maybe you listen to a good podcast about the importance of keeping your thoughts pure. You feel convicted about that and pray the Lord would help you do so. Things are fine for a few days, but then one of those ads for a pornography site somehow shows up on your computer screen and all of a sudden your looking at that trash.

Or you are sitting in church, listening to the sermon, hungry to hear God's word. But then the pastor mentions some different sins people fall into and all of a sudden you start thinking, "Boy, I don't do those things. I guess I am a pretty good Christian. It's too bad other folks are not like me." And that pride seeps in and starts to eat away at your soul. And pretty soon your heart is growing cold and your compassion for others starts to evaporate. Oh, I think almost all of us take an occasional ride on that spiritual roller coaster.

Yet, the Lord doesn't give up on us. He won't give up on you. **Philippians 1:6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.** Now, let me be clear, the Lord is not pleased with the sin He sees in our lives. As Christian, it should be our goal, with God's help, to get off the roller coaster and be more consistent in trusting and following Jesus. We have talked before and will talk many times again about how we can do that.

The point today, however, is that if you are a Christian sometimes on that roller coaster, Jesus sees the words "Fragile: Handle with Care," stamped on our soul. Your inconsistency is not surprise to Him. He knows we are weak. He knows the temptations and struggles that we go through each day.

Yet, He does expect us to obey Him. He knows how foolish our excuses are. He loves you too much to be content with your spiritual mediocrity. But He is patient. Even after you have failed repeatedly, the Lord continues to love you and offer His help. We will sometimes experience real pain as the Lord reshapes our souls and helps us become the people He wants us to be, but He will always be gentle enough so that your bruised soul will not be broken, and your smoldering soul will not be put out. That is part of God's amazing grace.

So, friends, if you are finding it hard to follow the Lord and do the right thing, *do not be discouraged*. It is important that we don't become complacent about sin in our lives. We must not be content with the lack of godliness we sometimes see when we look in the mirror. But we must also *not give up*.

If you didn't ready your Bible or take time to pray at all last week, with God's help you need to do so this week. If you have been too embarrassed this past year to tell your friends about your faith in Jesus, with God's help, you need to start opening your mouth in 2026. If you have been struggling with a sinful addiction of some type for the past few years, (alcohol, pornography, gambling, etc.) you need to resolve that. With God's help you will find victory in the year ahead.

I want you to get his truth ingrained in your mind so that you remember it not just here at church, but also the next time you stumble and do something wrong. Don't forget the Lord Jesus is patient and gentle. If you fall flat on your face as you are following Jesus, you need to get up, confess your sin, ask for the Lord's help, and *keep going*.

The Lord will not give up on you. As **2 Timothy 2:13** says, **if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself**. Friends, even if you are struggling to follow Jesus, you should not be discouraged, and you certainly should not give up.

And let me say, if you are struggling, don't try to fight the battle alone. Talk to any of our pastors, elders or deaconesses. We would love to try and help.

Secondly, we need to be patient with other Christians who are struggling to trust and follow Jesus. We need to follow Jesus' model. Spiritually bruised and smoldering Christians are all around us. If Jesus treats those who are weak with compassion and care, we need to treat each other that way as well.

In Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8, the Lord, through the Apostle Paul, tells us we must be concerned for fellow Christians who are "weaker" than we are. He says we sometimes need to refrain from doing something that is perfectly okay, if doing that is going to offend someone else.

We need to be concerned not only for our own spiritual welfare, but also about the spiritual health of fellow believers in Jesus, especially those who are struggling. Like, Jesus, we need to recognize that our fellow Christians often have

souls that are somewhat fragile. We need to handle them with care.

This means we should provide gentle correction when we see another Christian going astray, either in lifestyle or beliefs. Remember what **James 5:19, 20** tells us, **My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins**. Those verses are so important in our current setting.

Maybe you have a family member or friends who claims to be a Christian but is not really following the Lord. Please remember what both James and 2 Timothy say. You must not stand by and just watch someone you care about sink into a spiritual pit. Yet as you seek to help them, you need to remember their soul is fragile, and you need to treat them with love and care.

So, when your friend Bill starts having doubts about whether the Bible is really God's Word, yelling at him for being so stupid is not the right response. You need to try to answer some of His questions and direct him to resources that explain why we believe the Bible is the Word of God.

When your cousin Julie ends up getting a divorce, rather than pointing your finger and telling everyone what a terrible person she is, you need to comfort and encourage her to look to the Lord for strength. When Jason, a fellow at church gets caught in some sin, and everyone know about it, rather than trying to embarrass or shame him, you need to offer your support and remind him of the free and full forgiveness that comes when we truly confess our sins to the Lord.

Folks, I am now 68 years old. I think my faith in the Lord has grown over these past 10 years. But I am also more aware of my spiritual weakness, my fragileness, than I was 10 years ago. I also understand the depth of God's compassion and His strength more than I did 10 years ago.

I am weak, but He is strong. Knowing that is the case I need to frequently ask myself this question: Am I relying on my strength which is inadequate, or am I relying on the Lord's strength which is far greater than I could ever need? That is the

question I have for you as well: Are you relying on your own strength or are you relying on the Lord?