

# Battered Reeds and Smoldering Wicks

by Thom Gardner

*"BEHOLD, MY SERVANT WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN; MY BELOVED IN WHOM MY SOUL IS WELL-PLEASSED; I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM, AND HE SHALL PROCLAIM JUSTICE TO THE GENTILES. HE WILL NOT QUARREL, NOR CRY OUT; NOR WILL ANYONE HEAR HIS VOICE IN THE STREETS. A BATTERED REED HE WILL NOT BREAK OFF, AND A SMOLDERING WICK HE WILL NOT PUT OUT, UNTIL HE LEADS JUSTICE TO VICTORY. AND IN HIS NAME THE GENTILES WILL HOPE."* Matt 12:15-21

A man and woman sit exhausted on opposite sides of the lawyer's table. A look of empty resignation overshadows their faces as they divide up the ruins of irreconcilable differences. There seems to be no other alternative—no other apparatus to maintain the integrity of their covenant. Both sink into leather covered chairs loaded down with guilt and the weight of failed expectations. There seems to be nowhere else to go. The differences will never be reconciled—never perfected. They are like the man who lay helplessly by the pool of mercy waiting for someone to take them to the water. There was no help for them—no place of comfort. They are bruised and bent nearly flat under the burden of justice or injustice as the case may be. The light has been snuffed out.

## Battered Reeds

We are surrounded by battered reeds and smoldering wicks. The battered reeds are those who have been crushed—flattened and bent nearly double. They have grown numb under the weight of offenses and unresolved conflicts—brittle with wounds—scored along a line and ready to be broken in two as a piece of glass. It may be that they are bent double by their own sin or the compulsive justice they would meet

out to those who have sinned against them. Regardless of who bears the blame, they themselves bear the weight of it.

## Smoldering Wicks

Smoldering wicks are those whose lamps are out of oil. Life and virtue have been poured out with no way to refill the lamp. Smoldering wicks are those whose lives are depleted—whose wick is out of oil with the last the hint of smoke wafting into the air. The oil is the light and hope that keeps them moving. It and their lives have been used up and their lights nearly extinguished—their virtue nearly exhausted.

Together these present the picture of the need. They are the wounded and the weary—they are all around us—they are us.

## A New Realm of Life

There is a realm of power and sweetness pouring from the throne of God that overwhelms those living here at His footstool. (Isaiah 66:1) There is a fragrance that draws us to the table of God's mercy. The opening Bible quotation describes the rising of the "Servant" of God—the Messiah—Jesus Christ. God has placed His spirit, His character upon this Servant. Now we see the arising of His character through His body; the Church.

We are entering a new realm and season in the life of those who follow Christ. This is a season more of character than charisma where we are becoming the fragrance of Christ to the perishing. (2 Corinthians 2:15) If we are to take part in this season of renewal it will be by coming to maturity and growing up to the Head of the body and becoming what He is.

Battered reeds surround us in our personal lives and connections as well. "They are the unforgiven and even the unrepentant. They are the ones we have

written off and placed beyond the hope of even God's boundless grace. Jesus never wrote anyone off—they always had good credit at the mercy bank. In fact He went out of His way to find them, to touch them, to bring them to the table.

Jesus, the Anointed Servant of God, was Himself both battered reed and the smoldering wick. He hung from His cross battered by the unjust and cruel blows of the very ones He loved so. He was perfect and sinless deserving mercy more than any other ever born, though He never “cried out” (vs 19) for it. Healing life and anointing was crushed out of Jesus at Gethsemane as He denied Himself, like the olives that released their oil under the weight of that press. This was where the very heart of God was released to the battered and depleted. He recognizes and agonizes with those who have been crushed as He was.

#### As He was, so are we...

The profile of the Servant is also the profile of the merciful—the ones through who the world will see the heart of God, “because as He is, so also are we in this world. (1 John 4:15-17) We who have been partakers of his divine salvation are also “partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.” (2 Peter 1:4) Everything we need has been given to us in Christ. Therefore with no need for vengeance or fairness so we can extend mercy.

As the Servant, we are children and servants of God who present no will of our own and who rely upon the One served. The word translated servant is *pais*, which means servant and child. Jesus was both child and servant of the Father. We can also give away something sweet because Daddy owns the candy store. We give to whoever is there.

As the Servant we are loved and chosen of God. (vs. 18) What could we need that even approaches that? This is the place of total safety and purpose. We are the delight of our Father—the ones in whom He takes particular pleasure just like we do with our own kids. If the Father loves us who can hurt us or threaten us?

Just as Jesus did, we are to proclaim justice, the Father's heart, even to the Gentiles, those who in our lofty estimation don't deserve it. If they deserved it, it would not be mercy, would it? We are the ones

filled with His Spirit that demonstrates His approval to us and through us.

What must the battered and depleted seen in the eyes of Jesus as He carried the heart of the Father to them? What do they see in our eyes? What did hookers and dishonest revenueurs feel at his approach? Did they feel shame or hope? What do those who have hurt you—those whose markers you hold feel at your approach?

Perhaps the most telling question what do we feel at the approach of the Lord? What does the thought of His presence make us want to do? Are we frozen in fear, hiding in shame? What is it that makes it so? We know about the work of the cross but have we accepted it? Do we believe it? Do we know the embrace of the Father? Can we smell his after shave as it were?

In His name, His character or heart, will the gentiles hope. The “name” is the distillation of the character and heart of God. It is the supreme source of hope for the battered and depleted. In the end, nothing else will bring peace to us but the name of God. It is the name of God that draws us to a table of grace rather than one of negotiation.

We will spend this book looking at the heart of God as it is unfolded and displayed through His mercy. I do not pretend to know the heart of God, but I can see what it is like. I know that it is mercy that is at the core of His heart—that compels God to pour out His love and empty Himself to we the battered reeds and smoldering wicks.

**O Israel, hope in the LORD; For with the LORD there is mercy.** Ps 130:7 NKJV GETHSEM'ANE (geth-sem'a-ni; Gk. from Aram . "oil press")

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