

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 26 May 2024. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Meek and Mild Messiah

Matthew 12:14-21

In 1962, a Canadian couple named **Don and Carol Richardson**, and their seven-month-old baby, went to Papua New Guinea, to take the Gospel to a tribal people called the **Sawis**, in the remote province of **Irian Jaya**. Their mission among the Sawis was dangerous, to say the least—not only because of the many deadly diseases that they could contract in the rain forests, but also because the Sawis were head-hunters and cannibals. Even the Sawi language was an enormous challenge. (They soon discovered that there were nineteen tenses for every verb in their language!) However, the biggest challenge of all was trying to explain the Gospel of salvation to a people who had seemingly no ability to understand mercy or redemption. To the Sawis, treachery and deception were *virtues to be applauded*, instead of evils to be abhorred! When they told the Sawis the story of how Judas betrayed the Lord for thirty pieces of silver, they hailed Judas as a hero for his cunning act of treachery! When they presented Jesus as the meek and mild Redeemer of mankind, the Sawis laughed them to scorn, and considered the Lord Jesus to be a fool!¹

Now, besides trying to preach the Gospel, the Richardsons also attempted to make peace between three Sawi villages. They tried to convince the people of these three villages that they didn't *have* to hate each other, and make war with each other—that they could come together as one, and live in peace. However, their efforts were failing miserably. Instead of promoting peace, the dialogue between the villages was actually stirring the pot of hatred and distrust. The villages were now right on the verge of an all-out war! Because of this, the Richardsons decided to drop the peace efforts, and leave. However, personal safety wasn't the reason for their decision to leave. They weren't afraid of becoming lunch for the cannibals: they simply didn't want to be the cause of major violence, and loss of life. They figured that if they left, the villages might return to their state of isolation, and the threat of war would subside.²

However, as they were preparing to leave, the Sawis (much to the Richardsons' surprise) begged them to stay! They promised Don and Carol that if they would stay among them, they would attempt to live in peace with each other. Not only that, but the Sawis themselves had a plan to accomplish this peace. So, the Richardsons stayed the night; and the next morning, when they awoke at dawn to watch the Sawis' peace ritual, they were shocked at what they saw!³

Before the end of this message, I will tell you what the Richardsons saw that day! For now, though, I would like to turn your thoughts to a synagogue in Galilee, about 2,000 years ago. The Lord Jesus had just healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath day; but instead of believing on Jesus as their Messiah, some of the people rejected Him. In fact, there was a group of men who angrily stormed out of the synagogue that day, and whispered among themselves about how they might *destroy* this Jesus of Nazareth. Instead of seeking peace, these men were seeking *war*! Yet, Jesus' response to these evil men was just the opposite of *their* response to *Him*; and in this, we will see the spotless character of the Messiah. The title of this message is ***The Meek and Mild Messiah***.

Read Matthew 12:14-21.

I. The Messiah's character (vv. 14-16)

In **verse 14**, Matthew describes the “aftermath” that followed after Jesus had healed the man with the withered hand. Instead of acknowledging that Jesus is the Lord of Sabbath, and believing on Him as King and Messiah, the Pharisees went out of the synagogue that day and held a council as to how they might *destroy* Him. They weren't deliberating on *whether or not* to destroy Jesus; they were deliberating on *how* to destroy Him. They hated Jesus with a white-hot passion, because He was undermining their power. By effortlessly healing a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath day, Jesus had just made *their* man-made law against healing on the Sabbath look ridiculous. (And everyone knew it!) Yet, how did Jesus respond to the Pharisees' plot to kill Him? He retreated! Let's look again. **(Read Matthew 12:15.)**

Why did Jesus withdraw Himself when He knew that the Pharisees were plotting to kill Him? This doesn't seem very Messiah-like, does it? Was Jesus *afraid* of the Pharisees? Did He retreat because He felt that things were spiralling out of control? Of course not! Nothing was *ever* out of control for Jesus, because He is the Son of God! We're talking about the Man who simply walked away from the people of Nazareth, right when they were about to throw Him over a cliff. We're talking about the Man who simply walked away as the people were taking up stones to stone Him to death. We're talking about the Man who, when the chief priests sent officers to arrest Him, stunned the officers with His powerful words, so that they *couldn't* bring themselves to arrest Him. We're talking about the Man who, in the Garden of Gethsemane, uttered two simple words (“I am”), and caused the soldiers to fall to the ground. Jesus could have walked among His enemies indefinitely, without ever being harmed. Whether by putting His enemies into a confused mental state, or by causing His enemies to be temporarily “paralysed” and powerless, or by striking them to the ground, Jesus had countless ways of protecting Himself, because He is *el gibbor*—“*the mighty God*”! If He had wished, He could have called down legions of angels to wipe out all His enemies. Yet, He didn't.

How, then, do you explain the fact that Jesus retreated from His enemies? It can be explained in one word: “**Meekness.**” It has been said that “meekness” is “**power under control**”; and that is exactly the character of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is Meekness personified! He *could* have destroyed His enemies at any time; yet, in meekness and mercy, He did not. Jesus was mercifully giving even the Pharisees more time on this earth, and possible opportunities in the future, to believe on Him (*if* they would repent).

However, this is not the only reason why Jesus retreated from the Pharisees. One of the biggest reasons that Jesus often retreated from the Pharisees was that He had to die at the right time, at the right place, and in the right way, to fulfil all that had been prophesied of Him in the Old Testament Scriptures. If Jesus hadn't retreated to other places at certain pivotal times,

events wouldn't have unfolded the way that they did; and He would not have died on a cross on Passover day, A.D. 30, at 3:00 p.m. Jesus was constantly telling His disciples that "We must do such-and-such, that the scriptures might be fulfilled."

Now, were there any *other* reasons why Jesus retreated from the Pharisees? Yes, there is at least one more important reason. (And this is the most sobering reason of all!) Jesus often retreated from His enemies because *He does not stay where He is not wanted!* Jesus never forces Himself upon anyone. In **Genesis 6:3** the LORD said, "***My spirit shall not always strive with man.***" In other words, the Lord will not be trifled with by those who reject Him. Men have only so much time to respond to God, until He finally withdraws Himself from them completely, and does not contend with them or convict them anymore. That's scary! My friends, the most frightening thing in the world is the thought of Jesus' *leaving* you! Jesus never leaves those who are saved (although *fellowship* with Christ is restrained for believers, as long as they are living in disobedience); however, a *lost* person God *will* eventually forsake, if that lost person continually reject Him. That is why God's Word warns us, "***Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.***" There *is* a season when the LORD "***may be found***"; and it behoves sinners to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus while the door of mercy is still open.

This reminds me of the story of **Frank** (a former member of my home church), who went to be with the Lord several years ago. You see, there was a day, about 25 years ago, when Dan (one of our church members) and I went to visit Frank, to share the Gospel with him. Frank told us that he *couldn't* be saved; and we asked him why. He said that when he was sixteen, he had felt the Lord's conviction in his heart during a week of revival services; and he knew that he needed to be saved. However, he had ignored God's call, because he wanted to have his fun. He figured that he could be saved some other day. However, shortly afterward, his heart became as cold as a stone toward God. Even though he knew that he was lost and on his way to hell, he *couldn't* respond! Dan and I tried to reason with Frank, and to remind him that God is merciful and longsuffering, and not willing that any should perish. However, Frank said, "No, you don't understand. Even though I *wish* I could be saved, I literally *can't!*" Folks, I must say that that was one of the most chilling conversations I ever had with a lost person! He *knew* he was lost, yet he literally *could not* respond, because the Holy Spirit was not dealing with him. Frank had withdrawn from God; so God had withdrawn from him. However, the good news is that one day, many years later, God finally visited Frank again! Frank began to come to church, and listen to the preaching; and through the Word of God, the Holy Spirit once again stirred and convicted his heart; and he received Jesus as his Saviour! He got into the Kingdom just in time; and one day, we who are saved will see Frank in glory!

Now, let's return to the text. The event that we just read about here in **Matthew 12:15** was a real turning point. From this point onward, we see a repeating pattern in Jesus' ministry. The pattern was that the Pharisees opposed, and Jesus withdrew. Yet, there was another part to this pattern, as well: whenever Jesus withdrew from His enemies, there were always some who were humble enough to seek Him out, and find Him; and when they found Him, He ministered to them, and healed them. Jesus always resists the proud; but those who will humble themselves *even a little bit*, and seek after Him, He will deal with.

Brethren, there is something for us to learn from Jesus' pattern of dealing with people. When people get angry at you, and get in your face, you should confront them humbly, and kindly (just as Jesus confronted the Pharisees in the synagogue). However, if they continually rage and scorn, don't waste your time on heated rebuttals. Perhaps God *will* get hold of their hearts one day (and we should pray to that end); but in the meantime, focus your attention on those who will humble themselves enough to listen—even if only a little bit! Let's see what Solomon had to say about how to deal with scorers.

Read Proverbs 26:4-5.

On the surface, it seems that these two verses contradict themselves: but they do not. They *complement* each other, by showing us what to do in different situations. On the one hand, it *is* wise *not* to answer a fool "**according to his folly.**" This means that we shouldn't answer a fool with the same angry, bitter, sarcastic, vitriolic words that he uses. It is important to remember this proverb any time you are trying to witness to someone. Oftentimes, lost people will become angry when confronted with the Gospel, and will say provocative, insulting things, which could easily provoke you to react in the flesh. When this happens, ask the Lord for grace not to use angry, caustic words in return! Not answering a fool according to his folly also means, "**Don't be distracted by foolish questions.**" When you endeavour to share the Gospel with lost people, some will throw out a volley of foolish questions; and they don't allow you time to answer adequately. These insincere questions should not be given the dignity of a reply, for they are designed to draw you away from the subject of salvation.

However, there are times when it *is* appropriate to answer a fool "**according to his folly.**" What this means is that there are times when a fool's questions *should* be addressed, lest he interpret your silence as proof that you have no answer. For example, when a fool asks, "**Where did Cain get his wife?**", you should be prepared to show him, from **Genesis 5:4**, that Adam had sons and daughters who married each other, but that it was not against God's law for sisters and brothers to marry until God gave the Law to Moses (in **Leviticus 18**). When a fool says, "You Christians are hypocrites. You use the Bible to condemn homosexuals, yet you eat shellfish, which the Bible condemns," you should be prepared to show him that the Old Testament dietary restrictions were lifted by God in **Acts 10**; yet, God's command not to lie with mankind (in **Leviticus 18** and **20**) stands for all time. Of course, knowing *when* to answer a fool according to his folly, and when *not* to do so, requires wisdom. That is why we

should be ask God to guide our thoughts, and our tongue. That is also why we should look to Jesus as our Example. Follow the example of the Messiah, and have a meek and lowly spirit!

II. The prophecy of Messiah's character (vv. 17-21)

(Read Matthew 12:16.) We have seen that there were times when Jesus retreated from the Pharisees. However, this wasn't the only way that Jesus' meekness showed itself. Here in **verse 16**, Matthew says that Jesus commanded those whom He had healed *not* to tell others who had healed them! To *men*, this doesn't seem like the way that the King of Israel would conduct Himself; yet, this is *precisely* how God said the Messiah would conduct Himself. Matthew goes on to show us, from Old Testament Scripture, that this "meek and mild" spirit was *exactly* the character that God said the Messiah would have. Let's read **verses 17-21**; and then we will read the Scripture that Matthew is quoting. **(Read Matthew 12:17-21.)**

Read Isaiah 42:1-4.

In these verses, the LORD speaks of His "*servant*," His "*elect*," in whom His "*soul delighteth*." *Who* is this "*servant*"? Well, from **Isaiah** chapter **40** to chapter **53**, this special title, "*my servant*," is used 20 times; yet, it is applied to two different "persons." In **Isaiah 41, 44, and 45**, the title "*my servant*" refers to **the nation of Israel as a whole**. God raised up the people of Israel to be His servants; and thus, He refers to them, *collectively*, as His "servant."

However, the title "*my servant*" does *not always* refer the nation of Israel. In **Isaiah 42, 49, 50, and 52**, the word "servant" clearly refers to an *individual* within the nation of Israel; and that individual is the Messiah. Now, Jewish people who reject Jesus as their Messiah vehemently deny that any of the "servant" passages in **Isaiah 40-53** refer to a particular "missionary" (or "sent one") from Jehovah. In other words, they deny that any of these "servant" passages refer to the Messiah. They insist that *every* time the word "servant" in used in these chapters, it refers to the nation of Israel. For example, in **Isaiah 53**, it was prophesied that "*he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities.*" We who know the Lord Jesus Christ look at this passage and clearly see our Saviour, who was wounded for our sins, and took our punishment, so that we might be saved. Yet, most modern Jewish rabbis look at this same passage and say, "No, the suffering Servant is not an individual. It is *Israel*. *Israel* has suffered at the hands of Gentile nations for centuries; and through their suffering, atonement is being made for all mankind. One day the nations will recognise and accept their responsibility for the suffering that they had caused to Israel; and *then* mankind will be redeemed."

However, there are some huge problems with this argument. For one thing, in **Isaiah 41**, the LORD directly addressed the nation of Israel and said, "***Thou art my servant.***" Yet, in **Isaiah 42:1**, the LORD, while *still addressing Israel*, said, "***Behold my servant.***" Obviously, the "servant" here in **Isaiah 42:1** is someone *other than* Israel, because God is commanding Israel to "behold" Him! In **Isaiah 53**, we see the difference between Israel and the Servant repeatedly! For example, in **Isaiah 53:3**, Isaiah states that "***we esteemed...not***" Jehovah's Servant. By using the pronoun "we," Isaiah was referring to *himself and his own people*, Israel. How, then, could Israel be "the Servant" of **Isaiah 53**, if Israel is the very people who *despised* the Servant? In **Isaiah 53:8** we are told that Jehovah's Servant would be "***stricken***" for "***the transgression of my people.***" According to this verse, *Isaiah's* own people, Israel, would be responsible for the striking of Jehovah's Servant! How, then, could *Israel* be the Servant, if they were the ones who would *strike* the Servant? In **Isaiah 53:9**, we are told that Jehovah's Servant "***had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth.***" How can the Jewish people really say that they, as a nation, have done no violence or deceit, when the LORD Himself described Israel as a "***sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity***"? Also, in **Isaiah 53:10** we are told that Jehovah's Servant would be made "***an offering for sin.***" Since God says that Israel is a "***sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity,***" how could their suffering make atonement for the sins of *any* nation (much less for their *own* sins)?

Even the Jews' own ancient collection of rabbinical commentaries, the *Targum*, states that the "Servant" of **Isaiah 42** is the Messiah!⁴ The ancient *Midrashim*, and even the Jewish rabbinical commentaries from the Middle Ages, also recognised that **Isaiah 42:1** was a prophecy of the Messiah. For example, the Medieval Jewish rabbi, **Rashi**, said that **Isaiah 42:1** is "a prophecy about the Messiah who will be filled with the Spirit of God and bring justice to the World."⁵ Sad to say, most modern Jews deny what their own ancient rabbis taught, because if they acknowledge that *some* of the "Servant" passages refer to the Messiah, then they would be forced to admit that *Jesus* is the fulfilment of those prophecies!

My friends, the Servant of **Isaiah 42:1-4** is none other than Jesus Christ; and if I could sum up this portrait of Jesus in two words, I would use the words "meek" and "mild." Now, at first glance, one may wonder *in what sense* Jesus was "meek" and "mild." After all, Jesus was constantly preaching in the streets; and He called the Pharisees "***hypocrites,***" "***blind guides,***" and "***fools.***" Jesus doesn't appear to have been soft-spoken! We even see Jesus, on a couple occasions, driving the money-changers out of the Temple. In what sense, then, did Christ not "***cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street***"?

Well, I believe the answer can be found here in **Matthew 12:15-20**. As Matthew quotes **Isaiah 42**, and applies this prophecy to Jesus, he specifically says that this prophecy applies to Jesus because He charged those whom He had healed *not to make Him known*. It is in *this* sense that Jesus did not cry, nor lift up His voice. He preached, and lifted up His voice against sin, and used His voice to warn sinners to repent; but He didn't use His voice *to promote Himself*. He was not pompous or self-promoting. He did His Father's will, and said what the

Father would have Him say, and let the miracles speak for themselves; but He didn't boast Himself, or force Himself on anyone. When He did a miracle, He often "slipped out the back door," before anyone could praise Him. He didn't even run after those who abandoned Him, or try to urge them to come back! He just stood there meekly, and let them go.

Read John 6:66-71.

As you read through all the Gospels, never do you see Jesus angrily defending Himself when people made outrageous charges against Him. He gently rebuked, and asked conscience-provoking questions; but He did not use cutting, retaliatory words. Many times, He did not even give a defence at all—such as when the people accused Him of being "*born of fornication*" (in other words, that His mother was a whore). Now, if *we* had been Jesus' disciples standing there that day, we would have been tempted to yell at Jesus' accusers, and say, "He was born of a *virgin*!" But *Jesus* didn't. He made no reply to that accusation at all!

Perhaps the reason we have trouble understanding Jesus' meekness is that we, as sinners, have a distorted idea of what a "leader" is. We often think of a "leader" as someone who is sharp-tongued, self-asserting, possessing plenty of self-esteem, and who doesn't take flak from anyone. Yet, this is *not* the Jesus who walked this earth 2,000 years ago. Though Jesus is the Judge who will rule all nations one day, He humbly submitted Himself to human authorities in His first coming to earth. Even when He pronounced woe upon the Pharisees, He said it in a sad, tearful tone. He *wept* over the very people whom He had to rebuke.

Read Matthew 23:13-14, 33-39.

Read Luke 19:41-44.

As believers, we should strive to be like our Lord Jesus Christ. We should be firm in our stand for truth, yet gentle and patient; not self-promoting, self-defending, or self-vindicating; not forceful or coercive; and full of compassion, even toward those who revile us. In so doing, we put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. I have seen this many times as I've shared the Gospel with people. There was a time, years ago, when I was out door-knocking here in Athlone; and I was met by a very "mouthy" teenager, who asked me what I thought of gays. Of course, I told him that I love *gays*, and care about their souls, but that I cannot accept their *lifestyle*, since it is a sin against God. Well, no sooner had I uttered the word "sin," than he exploded in anger, and shouted to all his friends in the neighbourhood to come and see this "homophobe." Well, in short, I got raked over the coals. Josh screamed at me for at least five minutes; and every now and then, I attempted to answer his "questions," only to be screamed at as soon as I started to speak. However, as I continued to speak softly to Josh and his

friends, he began to calm down, and listen; and by the end of the conversation, they were all listening, as I shared the Gospel with them. Some of them even took tracts, and Gospels of John. Why did they calm down and listen? Because a soft answer turns away wrath!

Read Proverbs 15:1.

I thank God for the times in my life when I have put **Proverbs 15:1** to practice, and have thereby turned away wrath. However, even on my best day, I cannot hold a candle to the character of my Saviour. The King of Israel truly is the “*Gentle Jesus, Meek and Mild*”! Isaiah prophesied that He would not break a bruised reed, nor quench smoking flax. What does this mean, anyway? Well, reeds are fragile, and easily broken; and smoking flax (the wick of a candle) is ready to break at any minute, because it is already burnt. These figures of speech describe people who are feeble in mind, and weak in spirit—people who have been deeply bruised, hurt, or crushed by sin. Now, make no mistake about it: Jesus did *not* say smooth words to sinners, or give them the impression that their sin was O.K. However, He *was* gentle and longsuffering with the hurting, and told them that their sins could be forgiven if they would repent and believe on Him. Jesus gently instructed sinners. He bound up the broken-hearted, and set the prisoners free. He didn’t “burn out” in His labours, either. Isaiah prophesied that “***He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth.***” The Hebrew word for “***he shall not fail***” literally means “he shall not grow dim.” To put it in modern terminology.... “He won’t burn out”! The magnitude of the work that Jesus did when He was on earth is staggering. He rose up long before daybreak, and worked until late at night. People crowded around Him all day long, as they sought to be healed, or to hear His preaching. Even when He tried to take a rest, the people found Him; and rather than turn them away, He served them. Yet, He never tired of the work. Even now, as Jesus sits on His throne in heaven, He works tirelessly for us! He is constantly interceding for us to the Father; and He will *continue* to labour for us until the day when He returns to earth, sets up His Kingdom, and sets forth “***judgment unto truth.***” For a thousand years, He will teach all the peoples of earth—both Jew and Gentile—the ways of the LORD; and peace will reign in the earth. My friends, *no one* is, or ever will be, meeker than Jesus is! He is the King of kings; yet, He cares so much for our souls, that He humbled Himself to come into our world, and purchase our peace with God by dying on a cross. He will bring peace to the world one day; but for now, He is bringing peace to people’s hearts, by saving repentant sinners. And this brings me to the “rest of the story” that I promised at the beginning of this message.

On that morning when the three Sawi tribes came together to make peace, they made an agreement with each other. They knew how prone they all were to deception and treachery; and so, they decided that a family from each of the three villages would *give up his child* to go and live in one of the other villages. As long as that child lived, and was unharmed, peace would continue. Don and Carol Richardson watched in amazement as a man from one of the villages tearfully gave *his only son* to go and live in one of the other villages, so that they

might have peace. They called him “the Peace Child.” As Don beheld this, it struck him that this “Peace Child” was a beautiful picture of Jesus Christ, the *true* Peace Child, who came into our world, and lived among lying, treacherous sinners, so that we might be saved. Don used this illustration to help the Sawis understand what Jesus did for us; and as the result, many of the Sawis believed on Jesus, gave their lives to Him, and became new creations in Christ!⁶

Conclusion: My friend, have *you* been made a new creation in Christ? Have *you* surrendered your life to the meek and mild Jesus, who loves you so much that He laid down His life for you? He will bring peace and rest to your soul if you will only believe on Him, repent of your sin, and surrender your life to Him. If you are saved already, I would ask, “Are you imitating your Saviour’s character?” Jesus is meek and mild, and He became a little Child, so that you might be saved. Are *you* humbling yourself as a little child, and following His pattern of meekness, kindness, and loving forbearance? If you need to humble yourself before Him today, let Him have His way with you in this invitation.

¹ Michael Youssef, *Jesus, Jihad, and Peace* (Brentwood, TN: Worthy Publishing, 2015), p. 216.

² *Ibid*, p. 217.

³ *Ibid*.

⁴ Edward Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), p. 108.

⁵Mat Sati, “Why the Antimissionary Claim about Isaiah 42, Yeshua, and the Servant Song is Erroneous, ישעיהו מב:א-ו / Isaiah 42:1-6,” November 25, 2023, <https://www.matsati.com/index.php/why-the-antimissionary-claim-about-isaiah-42-yeshua-and-the-servant-song-is-erroneous-isaiah-42-1-6/>.

⁶ Youssef, *Jesus, Jihad, and Peace*, p. 217.