

Bruised Reeds and Smoldering Wicks

- Many modern Evangelical Christians think that evangelism and justice don't belong together and that they compete for attention and resources.
- Matthew quotes this passage in Isaiah about Jesus:

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 12:18-21 ESV, See also Isaiah 42:1-4)
- When it says that the Messiah will "bring forth *mishpat* for the nations," it means God will extend that relationship and covenant to everyone with all its benefits.ⁱ
- *How* Jesus brings *mishpat* is significant.
- Jesus brings justice to the nations through gentleness and meekness, not violence and force.ⁱⁱ
- Isaiah uses two images—bruised reeds and smoldering wicks—to describe the way the Messiah would treat people:
 - **Bruised Reeds:** At the time Isaiah was writing, reeds were a common material used in a lot of everyday objects.
 - If the fibers were bruised, they were just discarded.
 - Their use was gone and there were plenty more to replace them.
 - **Smoldering Wicks:** Wicks in oil lamps would smolder when the oil had been consumed, so instead of producing light, they would produce smoke.
 - Their purpose of creating light had ended. "Bruised reeds" and "smoldering wicks" represent people who are viewed as useless and cast off.
 - These images of the bruised reeds and smoldering wicks show that Jesus' purpose is to save, not destroy—including saving those that the world casts off as without value or use.ⁱⁱⁱ
- When we evangelize the lost, we are going to get close to the "bruised reeds" and "smoldering wicks" of the world.

Demystifying Biblical Justice

- Reflecting God’s heart for people and His order for life is expressed through justice and evangelism.
- Throughout history, many Christians and churches have seamlessly integrated justice and evangelism.
- Examples of evangelists who have paired evangelism and justice (read everything you can about these heroes for inspiration):
 - Bartolome de las Casas
 - William and Catherine Booth (Salvation Army)
 - Dr. John Perkins

ⁱ Marshall, Christopher D. *Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001.

ⁱⁱ Smith, Gary V. *Isaiah 40-66*. The New American Commentary Series, edited by E. Ray Clendenen et al. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009.

ⁱⁱⁱ Weber, Stu. *Matthew*. Holman New Testament Commentary, edited by Max Anders Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000.