

# “The Name for Hope”

Matthew 12.9–21

<sup>9</sup>Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, <sup>10</sup>and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”

<sup>11</sup>He said to them, “If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out?” <sup>12</sup>How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”

<sup>13</sup>Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. <sup>14</sup>But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

<sup>15</sup>Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. Many followed him, and he healed all their sick, <sup>16</sup>warning them not to tell who he was. <sup>17</sup>This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

<sup>18</sup>“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. <sup>19</sup>He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. <sup>20</sup>A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. <sup>21</sup>In his name the nations will put their hope.” [NIV]

HOPE  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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## I. Introduction

Merry Christmas, everyone! Okay, now let's get real. The existence of conflict is no surprise to us. As the hands of the clock rotate quicker, the veneer of trees and sparkly store windows wears thinner. Greetings once cheerful are now frosty. Opinions once discussed are now identities that divide. Readiness to listen is now willingness to silence. Governing to serve the many is now politicizing to mold mediocre oneness. Sustaining the values of a blessed nation is now apologizing for vehemence of committed assaulters. No, conflict is no surprise.

What does not cease to surprise us, however, is the colossal conflict we have with the Creator of heaven and earth. But even this conflict is not so wide or long or high or deep as the radical resolution sent by God and the result we now may enjoy. These verses in the Gospel According to Matthew recall our attention to the conflict, the resolution, and the result, all of which we remember in this season. Conflict, resolution, and result.

## II. Conflict

So what's the conflict? We have just read of three apparent conflicts: conflict between death and life, between justice and mercy, and between authority and humility.

### A. *Death and Life*

This first one—death and life—leaves you scratching your head a little. The Jewish authorities want to kill Jesus because He wants to give life to the Jews. Here's the problem. They had heard God say to their ancestors, “Rest from your work and enjoy Me in worship on the seventh day of the week. You need the rest for your health, and you need Me for your happiness. And don't worry; I'll provide for all your needs; you won't miss that day's income. In fact, you'll gain something far more valuable than the money you might have made.” They heard God say that, but they didn't like the way it made them feel dependent upon God. So they took charge of the command, that they might feel a little more in control.

God meant the Sabbath day to be a life-giving day, but they had made it into a life-taking day. If the doctor can cure you but refuses your request, she is actually depriving you of life, which is the same as taking it away. “Tough,” they said. “God said ‘Don't work,’ so the dying person will just have to come back tomorrow.” When you stick to the letter of the Law and ignore the Spirit of the Law, then it's easier to blame God when things go wrong, you see. You can justify yourself and say it was God who messed up.

Jesus, who came to give life, saw through their sinister mask and called them on it. “You will serve a beast to save it from the pit, but you'll oppress a human made in the image of God.” Then Jesus gave a little life to the man with a shriveled hand, and the Pharisees plotted to take all the life away from Jesus.

By the way, offense is like the disease and forgiveness like the cure. If you are withholding forgiveness from someone for their offense against you, then are you not giving death its way when you might allow life to prevail? Death and life.

### B. *Justice and Mercy*

The second conflict is between justice and mercy. Isaiah, who John quotes, was an old-time prophet who lived seven hundred years before Jesus was born in a stable. Isaiah faithfully warned the Israelites of the justice they would have to serve, if they continued rebelling against God with their hypocrisy, greed, and idolatry. God, you see, is neither fickle nor arbitrary. Sin—disobedience to God's commands—must be punished. This is especially so when God's own special people sin, for then they especially dishonor His great name.

However, that is not all God gave Isaiah to tell the Israelites of old. God sent word through Isaiah of a Servant who would come. At first this is not good news, because this Servant would come to proclaim justice! Well, if you are in prison and sentenced to the gallows, it may not thrill you to hear the hangman calling your name.

But it seems that this particular Servant is not calling anyone's name. He comes with no quarrel; He cries out no names. The streets are lined with those who, for their wicked injustice, deserve the severest justice. Yet they do not hear Him calling their name.

He comes with the approbation of God Most High, which must mean that He has never crossed God in a single thought, word, or deed. He comes with the full power of the very Spirit of God resting upon Him. He speaks the Truth and nary a soul can refute Him. Even the Roman governor declares that he finds no fault in Him. Yet no one hears Him calling their faults upon themselves.

There is more. Some of them begin feeling their conscience prick them. They haven't felt it in awhile. Now they find they cannot but acknowledge the peril they face when justice is called against their account of injustice, evil, and sin. They know God cannot arbitrarily waive sentences of guilt. They try to avoid the eyes of this Servant, for they expect His mere glance will unveil the full burden of what they deserve. Yet they are compelled to look at Him, and behold, what do they see? Mercy in the form of a Person. They are like a bruised and wind-battered reed, but He does not break them. So easily and so justly could He condemn them to eternal torment, but everything in His countenance conveys mercy, healing, reconciliation.

There are others. They begin to remember the mercies of which God has spoken for centuries. They begin to recount the bounteous promises God has given to them of abundant life. They feel their insides beginning to relax by the look of love in His eyes... but quickly they turn away. “No, it cannot be! It cannot come to me!” These mercies, these promises, these stirrings are all foggy, drifting in and out of reach. “I've done too much bad stuff! And people, people in the church, no less, have been so mean to me! I just can't let these things pass! I don't like the decisions the leaders have made, I don't agree with the way they want to worship! I just don't feel like I fit in here!”

They try to avoid the eyes of the Servant, for they expect uncaring reprimand. Yet they are compelled to look at Him, and behold, what do they see? Mercy in the form of a Person. They are like a wick with a dim spark of faith covered up with a lot of smoke, but He does not snuff them out. So easily and so powerfully could He blow them out into utter darkness, but everything in His countenance conveys mercy, strong embrace, union. Somehow this Servant who proclaims justice abounds even more in merciful lovingkindness. Justice and mercy.

### ***C. Authority and Humility***

There is a third conflict... between authority and humility. A multitude of men in authority over the Jews is powerfully energized by fiery envy. Against this, One Man's strength stands secure in humility. He is humble as a baby, yet His victorious justice will overcome not only these in Israel, but also the most powerful among the furthest nations. Not in some powerful commando or politicrat, but in this humble Servant do multitudes from all the nations put their hope.

In the conflicts between death and life, justice and mercy, authority and humility, the chosen Servant proves the perfect resolution. In His death, eternal life arises. When He satisfies justice, extravagant mercy abounds. Through His humility, divine authority prevails.

### III. Resolution: Christ

And now for the question regarding the resolution: Does this sound like God to you? It did not sound like God to the Pharisees. That is probably because it did not sound like *them*. They built their model of God upon fires and earthquakes that shattered rocks, never mind bruised reeds. They built their concept of God upon storms and floods that snuffed out cities, never mind smoldering wicks. They had some reason for so thinking. The very God who came in the form of a baby had in fact spoken to their forefathers in fire and earthquake and wind and storm.

But He had done so to press them to seek a Word of mercy in a still, small voice. A few of their forefathers heard God’s grace in that still, small voice. Now it was time for all the world to hear God’s grace in the voice of Servant who came into the world as a baby. A still, small voice that would not cry out in the streets. A still, small voice that did not come to condemn sinners but to save them. A still, small voice that cuts through all the smoke and fans a spark into a brilliant flame of faith.

Who is this Servant? Why does He sound so unlike us? Why does He look so much like us? Who is He? He is the one chosen by God to accomplish God’s purpose—the purpose God first revealed to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. After Adam and Eve obeyed the serpent and rebelled against God by eating the forbidden fruit, they could only expect the wages of sin, which God said is death. But then God said He would send a *Seed*, a Descendent, who would crush the head of the serpent though His heel would be struck.

That is to say, God would send One who would destroy the deceiver of our souls. But to destroy the deceiver the Descendant must die. How? Why? Well, you see, it is not really the enemy who kills us. It is the Holy Law of God which, in pure and perfect and holy justice, requires death for sin. Do not underestimate how holy and pure God is! It is not the devil who kills us, but our own sins bring our ruin. We are responsible. What’s more, the sin of Adam who stood before God as the representative of all mankind, has been laid to our account.

Destroying the deceiver, then, is not enough to give us hope for life. Someone must take our sins from us and satisfy the Law’s justice in our place. Someone must give to us an account of perfect obedience to replace the account of rebellion we got from Adam. Could this Someone be an ox or a goat or any other kind of animal? No, this Someone must be human—fully human—to substitute for us who are fully human.

This Someone must know the full experience of human body and soul—that is, the full experience of humanity living within the perfect prescriptions of the Law of God. He must face every temptation the deceiver has presented to us... but sustain no mark against the Ten Commandments. And then, horror of horrors, He must take upon Himself every single one of our marks against the Ten Commandments. Every cross we have given to God’s law and justice, the Servant must take upon His own cross. Every sting of death we have deserved He must suffer in His death.

He must, then, come as a baby, that He be fully human. He must, however, be conceived by the Holy Spirit and not by man, that He inherit not the sinful lineage of the first Adam. He must, meanwhile, maintain His fully divine nature as the Son of God, that He might have the capacity to bear the curse of infinite justice and eternal wrath of God that is due for our sins. He is fully God and fully Man. Two natures, one Person.

And He must come willingly, that His Father might delight in Him, and be well-pleased with His sacrifice. For it is the Father’s will to save as many as should believe in the Servant and happily receive God’s mercy.

Resolution: Life granted to us through the death of the Servant. Resolution: Mercy abounds, will full satisfaction of justice. Resolution: Willing humiliation of the Servant pulls the ground out from under the deceiver, and all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to the Servant: Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior.

#### IV. Result: The Name for Hope

Conflict. Resolution. The result? <sup>21</sup>“In his name the nations will put their hope.” Very briefly notice three things: Name, Nations, Hope.

Name. There is no apology to be made here. The Holy Scriptures are perfectly exclusive. There is one and only one name. <sup>Act4.12</sup>“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” In His name alone is hope to be found.

Nations. There is no apology to be made here. The Holy Scriptures are perfectly inclusive. Nary a soul in all the world is not included in this free offer of God’s grace. <sup>Rom10.13</sup>“*Everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Hope. “Hope” in the Bible means *confident expectation*. It does *not* mean, “You’d like to think that, wouldn’t you?” It does *not* mean, “I’m dreaming of a white Christmas... or at least slopes covered with white before I return to school in Georgia.” No, Hope means confident expectation. Therefore, Hope must have a reasonable foundation. Hope is neither a wish nor a fable; Hope is based upon *reason*.

Are these your words? “I hope I will go to heaven”? How do you confidently expect *that*? Are these your words? “God chose Jesus and sent Him to serve a purpose. Jesus was born as a baby. Jesus never crossed God, for God was delighted in Him. Jesus’ resurrection from the dead proves God was well-pleased with His Son.”

Are these your words? “Jesus had the Spirit of God in Him, and that Spirit proclaims Justice. Jesus did not complain about serving Justice’s demand for my sins. Jesus will never condemn me or break me for the sins He has paid for. Jesus will never snuff me out no matter how often I do the things I hate to do and don’t do the things I want to do. He Will Not Snuff Me Out. Jesus rose from the death He suffered for me, and has given to me the life He deserved. He is coming again to receive me, and when He does, God will openly acknowledge that His Son satisfied for me every requirement that He might gain me as His beloved bride.”

#### V. Conclusion

Such is the nature of Hope. Listen, every child ever conceived has shown to the world that there *is* hope of life amidst a world of death. That is what God told Adam and Eve in the Garden. <sup>Gen3.15</sup>

But *this* Child was conceived and born to *BE* our hope of life amidst a world of death. Yes, we can *get* real and say “Merry Christmas” because He is real. He is our confident expectation. He is our eager anticipation. He is our life and our all. And His name is Jesus, the name for Hope.