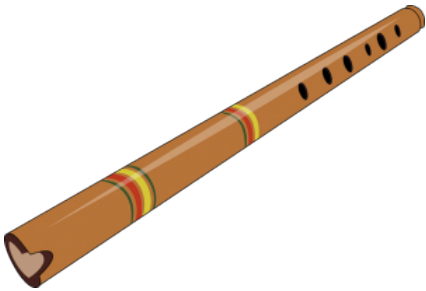


WORD STUDY – A BRUISED REED

Isaiah 42:3:



Isaiah 42:3: “A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench. He shall bring forth judgment unto truth.”

There is a beautiful double meaning in the word for *reed* (*qaneh*). But first a little history lesson. Ever wonder where David got his musical ability? He obviously had spent considerable time writing and composing his own music that he played for King Saul as a young man. More than likely his musical experience developed through a common practice among many shepherds who spent considerable time in solitude. To pass the time of day shepherds who had some musical ability would bind two reeds together which they hollowed out and put holes in the sides and made a little flute. A shepherd would then spend countless hours playing little tunes on his flute. This little flute was easily made and very fragile. If it was damaged in the slightest, I like the word used for *bruised* which is *rasas* and means slightly damaged, the shepherd would toss it away, sometimes just crushing under foot and make a new flute. After all it is easier and quicker to make a new flute than to try and repair the old one. Doesn't take much to total out a flute.

Sometimes, however, a shepherd may form an attachment to his little flute, and develop sentimental feelings for the instrument. In this case he would tenderly make repairs, binding up it's broken parts until once more it made the beautiful music he enjoyed. Do you ever feel like a *broken flute*, you've been totaled out and you expect to be tossed on the trash heap? If the Shepherd has a special attachment to you, He will restore you so you can once again make beautiful music for Him.

There might be some of you who would say: "Golly, I didn't know that, why doesn't he just call it a flute, why a reed?" There is a very good reason why the word *qaneh* (*reed*) is used rather than using the Hebrew word for *flute* which is *uwgab*. The writer is making an interesting play on words here for *qaneh* can also mean to redeem, to purchase in the sense of *redemption*. In other words the prophet is saying that for those that God *has redeemed*, he will play beautiful music. However, if we are *bruised* in anyway by sin, he will not just toss us away, and step on us and shatter us. But he will lovingly piece us back together so he can once again make beautiful music through us.

"The smoking flax shall he not quench" is an interesting picture. The ancients used to have little oil lamps that they would fill with some type of oil. They would set a piece of flax in the lamp and let it float on the oil. Then they would light it like a wick and let it burn. When the oil ran out, the person would simply toss the old flax or wick away and fill the lamp with oil and place a new wick in the lamp. Yet, the prophet is saying that we, like the old wick in the oil lamp, are not tossed out after the oil runs out. Instead, God will simply refill the lamp with oil and relight us.

Now this is one verse that we can really relate to in our 21st Century Western culture. We live in a disposal, throw away society. Our economy is built on the premise that as things wear out, we do not initiate repairs, we simply toss it out and buy something new.

The prophet in Isaiah 42:3 is telling us that God is in the recycling business. If we are a broken instrument or even a burned out wick, God will not dispose of us for someone younger, newer or fresher, even if that seems to be the most economical route to take. Instead he keeps us on the payroll, initiates whatever repairs are necessary and continues to make beautiful music out of us or uses us to lighten the way for others.