

Advent 3
Blessed Is the One Who Is Not Offended by Me
Matthew 11:2-10
Pastor James Preus

“And blessed is the one who is not offended by me?” Why would someone be offended by Jesus? Indeed, Jesus is the most offensive man in human history. He was crucified, because he was so offensive. And his Gospel is rejected, maligned, and perverted by many around the world, because who Jesus truly is, is too offense. Many false religions, such as Judaism, Mormonism, Islam, and Jehovah Witnesses, have arisen on account of the offense of the real Jesus. And Christians have been persecuted and murdered on account of the offense of Christ. So, why are people so offended by Jesus?

John sent his disciples to Christ Jesus to ask him if he was truly the One to Come, or if they should look for another. Jesus responds by saying, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.” Why does Jesus give this response? Because, by pointing out what Jesus has been doing, it is obvious from Scripture that he is the One to Come. He is the promised Christ!

Isaiah 35 predicts the coming of the Christ by saying, “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.” And again, in Isaiah 61, the prophet quotes the coming Christ as saying, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.” These are the clear signs that the people of God could expect from the Christ. And these are the exact signs that Jesus performs!

Many miracles were performed in the Old Testament. Many sick people were healed of their maladies. But not a single Old Testament prophet ever made a blind man see. Yet, Jesus does this many times as Isaiah predicted. Jesus performed more miracles than all the prophets combined. And when Jesus raised the dead to life, he did not simply pray to God as the prophets Elijah and Elisha did when they

raised the dead. Rather, Jesus by his own authority raised the dead. “Little girl, I say to you, arise.”, Jesus said.

Jesus proved himself to be greater than all the prophets of the Old Testament, greater than King Solomon, greater than the temple itself. He proved from Scripture and with his mighty works that he was not only David’s Son, but also David’s Lord. And this offended the scribes, Pharisees, and chief priests. Why did it offend them? Was it because they didn’t believe that he had done these miracles? No, they knew he had done these miracles. They simply accused him of doing the miracles with the finger of Satan. They were offended that Jesus claimed to be both God and man, that he taught that justice, mercy, and faithfulness were better than their religious pretenses. They were offended that Jesus forgave sinners and promised to save all who believed in him. Jesus’ teaching and works proved him to be the Christ, true God and man. Yet, he offended the religious elites, because he was not what they expected or wanted.

And for the same reason, Jesus is rejected today. It is said that it is unreasonable to believe that Jesus performed these miracles and was raised from the dead. Yet, we have the testimony of Scripture that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, performed many miracles, healed many sick and raised the dead, was crucified, died, and was buried, and on the third day he himself rose again from the dead. The reason people reject this, is not because it is unreasonable, but because this goes against their preconceived notions. In other words, they don’t want to believe it.

Four evangelists wrote of the life and work of Jesus, including his death and resurrection. They all agree. St. Paul, the author to the Hebrews, St. James, St. Peter and Jude likewise testified of Jesus while calling upon many other witnesses. Yet, their witness is dismissed, because it is in the Bible. “What witnesses do we have of Jesus besides the writings of the New Testament?” is often considered a valid question to delegitimize the New Testament. This would be like if a lawyer presented as evidence to a judge signed affidavits from several witnesses and the judge said, “Okay, but do you have any witnesses besides those who signed affidavits?” The New Testament is written by those who signed their testimony in blood. The only reason to reject their witness is because they claim what goes against your

preconceived notions, because they declare what you do not want to believe. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is only unreasonable if you refuse to submit your reason to the facts of Holy Scripture.

John the Baptist prepared the way of the Lord Jesus. Jesus asked his listeners what they went out in the wilderness to see. A reed blowing in the wind? That is to ask if John simply proclaimed what popular opinion dictated. That certainly is not what John did. John proclaimed the way of Jesus. Jesus does not tell us what we want to believe. He tells us the truth. And so, Jesus and his forerunner John offended those with itching ears. And this again is why Jesus offends today. While there are many churches that will bend wherever the wind is blowing to accommodate the feelings and opinions of the masses, these churches do not prepare the way of Jesus. Yet, John the Baptist, never a shaking reed, offends, because he demands that his hearers deny themselves for Jesus.

Jesus asked the crowd if they went out to find a man dressed in soft clothing. Certainly not. They did not look for a king out in the wilderness, but rather a man who would sleep in a king's dungeon on account of his preaching. John did not preach a prosperity Gospel that promised material wealth and earthly pleasures. Rather, he forsook all worldly riches and pleasures to proclaim the Gospel of eternal life through faith in Jesus. John the Baptist offends, because he demands that his hearers deny the riches of this world for Jesus.

John the Baptist offends those who are looking for a yes man, who will scratch their itching ears. John the Baptist offends those, who are in love with the riches and pleasures of this world. John the Baptist offends, because he prepares the way of the Lord Jesus. And he prepares the way of the Lord Jesus by preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

The word repent means to change one's mind. Repentance has two parts. First, contrition or sorrow over sin. The second is faith. True Christian repentance is when a sinner is sorry for his sins and turns to Christ for forgiveness and believes that his sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. Good works are then bound to follow the person who has faith in Christ.

Repentance comes about through the preaching of both the Law and the Gospel. The Law is what God commands of us, namely, that we love the Lord God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and that we

love our neighbor as ourselves. We are taught how to love in this way from the Ten Commandments. Yet, although the Law tells you to love, it gives you no power to do it. So, instead of the Law making you good, the Law proves that you are bad, as Romans 3:20 states, “By works of the law no human being will be justified in God’s sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.” It is important that the Law proves to you that you are a sinner, so that you know that you need a Savior. The Gospel is the good news that Jesus died for your sins and that God forgives you for Christ’s sake. The Gospel does not demand works, but rather faith. Faith is believing and trusting in God’s promise to forgive your sins for Christ’s sake.

The Law is offensive, because it accuses you of sin. No one wants his faults to be pointed out to him. No one wants to be called bad. No one wants to hear that he deserves to go to hell, that he has angered God, and that he is at fault. So, people are offended at the preaching of the Law and go rather where they will not hear about their sins.

The Gospel is offensive, because it takes away your power to boast. It says that you do not deserve God’s grace, but he gives it to you as a gift. But people want to earn their salvation. They want to be told that they deserve it. The Gospel does not tell you that you deserve a reward. The Gospel tells you that you are saved from your own sin and just damnation by God’s grace through the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. This is offensive.

The way John the Baptist prepares for the Lord is offensive to the world. It means that you must deny yourself, stop loving the things of this world, submit your reason to God’s word, repent of your sins and trust in Christ alone. The way John the Baptist prepares is offensive, because faith in Christ is offensive. But Jesus says, “Blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” That is to say, blessed is the one who has faith in Jesus Christ. Blessed is the one who denies himself, denies his wealth, repents of his sin, and trusts in Christ Jesus alone for forgiveness and salvation.

Jesus is offensive, because his Gospel attacks our false gods, our pride, our love of money and wisdom, and honor. Jesus is offensive, because he calls John who sits in prison waiting to be executed blessed, while he calls King Herod dining in the palace cursed. Jesus is offensive, because he calls tax-

collectors, sinners, adulterers, cheats, and thieves blessed, because they lay their sins on Jesus, while he calls the scribes, Pharisees, and high priests, who trust in their own righteousness, cursed. Jesus is offensive because his Gospel calls blessed the one who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly (Romans 4:5). Jesus is offensive, because he calls blessed the one who believes that Jesus' death takes away his sins. Jesus is offensive, because he truly did rise from the dead and promises a resurrection to eternal life to all who believe, an impossibility to those who worship their own science and reason.

Jesus calls blessed those who have been granted true repentance from the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Gospel. This change of mind and heart brings Christians to trust in their Lord and cling to his promises, even when the world laughs and rages against them. So, do not be offended that Jesus tells you that Baptism forgives your sins. Do not be offended that Jesus offers you his own body and blood to eat and to drink. Do not be offended that Jesus bids you to believe that when his servant forgives your sins in his stead, that your sins are indeed forgiven. Do not be offended that Jesus bids you to believe that all you've done to deserve hell has been forgiven by his blood.

When you are not scandalized by the preaching of the Law nor offended by the promises of the Gospel, you are not offended by Christ Jesus. To not be offended by Christ means to have your mind changed by the Holy Spirit; it means that you have true faith. And that is to be blessed forever. Amen.