

The Blessedness of the Un-offended **Matthew 11:1-6 (6)**

¹ Now it came to pass, when Jesus finished commanding His twelve disciples, that He departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities.² And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples³ and said to Him, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?”

⁴ Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and tell John the things which you hear and see:

⁵ The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

⁶ And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.”

The word offend is from the Greek, skandolizo, from which we get our word, scandalize. It is translated in some text, to stumble or to fall away.

- It is used by the Lord Jesus in **Matthew 5:29-30** when he speaks of those who have an eye that causes them to sin or stumble or fall away... his recommendation... pluck it out.
- Again in the same passage it is used of the right hand that might cause you to sin... “cut it off” Jesus says.
- Then the Lord Jesus uses this word of an individual who would cause a little one that believes in him *to stumble or fall away*...his pronouncement...it would be better for that person if they had a millstone put around their necks and that they be thrown in the deepest part of the sea. (**Mark 9:42**)
- It is used on another occasion when the Lord said that in His coming Kingdom all those things that offend or cause to stumbling shall be uprooted and cast away. (**Matt. 13:41**)

There are any number of examples of those who cause offense in this way and stumbling in this way. Here are some more obvious examples of such individuals...

The Atheistic teacher – Mr. Heller and his Passover Plot; the teacher I met in Kastroma Russia.

The Parent who squelches a child’s faith by their own hypocrisy or by their own skepticism

The person who perpetrates evil on the weakness of others and so scars them that they become psychologically and spiritually enchained by the offenses that have come upon them.

The Sibling who is not content to rebel alone but seeks to bring with him or her, a brother or sister.

Then there is **Satan** himself who regularly seeks to accuse and unsettle us so that we would fall away from a life of faith/trust in God.

All these we can understand as offenders...scandalizers... and we say, “*Woe to you! Be careful what you are doing!*” But here, in **Matthew 11:6**, the Lord Jesus claims to the holds the same potential to cause individuals to stumble, to fall away, to become offended with Him. **Could it be? How could it be?**

We are told in the New Testament that that Jesus **offended** those who did not believe in him. The people of his home town in Nazareth were offended when he came among them. **Mark 6:1-3** *Then He went out from there and came to His own country, and His disciples followed Him. And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing [Him] were astonished, saying, "Where [did] this Man [get] these things? And what wisdom [is] this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands! "Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?" So they were offended at Him. They could not accept those statements about himself that set him forward as the Messiah. The*

Pharisees and religious leaders of Christ's day had the same problem and could not accept those things Jesus said that indicated he was the Messiah or worse to them, set upon Jesus those prerogatives that belong to God alone. BUT here Jesus is speaking of John the Baptist, his right hand man and he was speaking to his disciples, those he had only recently addressed as friends.

That they could be scandalized and caused to stumble by Christ is a surprise. The suggestion here is that we who are followers of Jesus can become offended by the Lord Jesus as well. The very work of God in our lives can be a cause of our offense with Him and our falling away from Him.

Note: Each one of can become offended with God. Each one of us can fall away from our faith in Him. The Lord Jesus see's the potential even in the John the Baptist, and so he gives us this statement of blessing and of warning. "*Blessed is He who is not offended in me.*"

Let us consider this blessing... this warning... this possibility... Note first that...

I. Jesus is gentle in his warning.

- He states this warning as a blessing to John the Baptist. Here is a man who is in prison and who is suffering at this moment in isolation. Jesus needs to warn him about something but he sends the warning to him framed as a blessing.
- To his disciples he suggests that possibility of becoming offended in him but he doesn't speak of it in a tone of condemnation or of resentment. In fact Christ knows that there is coming a time when all of them are going to stumble and be offended by him. Just before they all fled from him in the garden of Gethsemane Christ said to them in **Matthew 26:31**, "*This night all of you are going to be offended, caused to stumble, because of me. All of you are going to run away from me.*" Jesus knew it was going to happen and yet he warns of it without any tone of resentment in his voice.
- Christ knows that we are going to misunderstand what he is doing at times.
- He knows that there will be occasions when we stumble away from Him.
- And Yet He still speaks to prepare us for our moments of weakness and doubt. There will be times when our faith is tried and tested but Jesus will not despise our troubled faith.
- **Isaiah 42:3** "*A bruised reed shall he not break, and a smoking wick shall he not quench.*"
- **Even** as the warning is given there is a positive promise and blessing provided.
- **There is this yearning** in the Lord Jesus... you can hear it sounding over his words, "*Oh the way is going to get rough, but hold on to me. It is all a part of my plan for your greater blessing.*"
 - Remember his words to Peter, "*Lord I'll never be caused to stumble because of you.*" "*Peter Satan wants to sift you as wheat but I have prayed for you.*" (Luke 22:31,32)

II. What are the causes of offense to be found in Jesus?

Well the Lord Jesus does not only *minister* to us, at times he *mystifies* us.

He will *bless* us and then *bewilder* us. His ways and thoughts are so far above ours. God says in **Isaiah 55:8** "*My thoughts are not your thoughts and my ways are not your ways.*" At one point Christ brings *comfort* to us and then His actions will *confound* us and *confuse* us to the point of distraction. He will answer our questions and in giving the answer leave us with even more questions. Every follower of the Lord Jesus will at times, wrestle with some great unanswered, "Why?"

Here was John the Baptist. He was called of God. God gave him a message to announce the coming of the Messiah/ the savior/ to announce the Lord Jesus coming to earth. John the Baptist's short ministry was all about preparing people and directing people to the Lord Jesus. He pointed at him and said, "*Look there is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.*" And yet now, John is in Herod's dungeon and he has been there for over a year. There in that dungeon he hasn't heard of all the miracles of Christ and if he has he has not personally benefited from a miracle himself. He has not heard Christ's teachings, instead his is the silence of prison walls. He who was so central in the rise of Christ's ministry is now seemingly forgotten.

The disciples will commit themselves to follow the Lord Jesus. They will leave their jobs, homes and families to follow him. For three to four years they were at his side in preparation of reigning with him in his kingdom. They must have exulted when Jesus said, "repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand." And they thrilled at every miracle that indicated the power of that coming Kingdom. But they will suffer. They will be persecuted and impoverished. They will endure testings and trials and torture and the sword for this King. I am sure the prison walls John is facing are waiting in their future and they will be seemingly forgotten as well. "*Blessed are those who are not offended in me.*"

There are causes for offense to be found in following the Lord Jesus.

III. How does this offense develop...take shape?

Let me suggest that it follows a pattern something like this...

1st certain thoughts and experiences cause you to have questions... what is God doing? Why this? Why doesn't he just do that, say that, reveal that? These questions don't rise in a vacuum they rise up out of challenges that come to our lives and our minds.

2nd Disappointments form around unanswered questions or unfulfilled hopes and dreams.

3rd You may attempt to simply bury those disappointments... You Deny them... stuff them away in some corner and try to keep on going.

4th Though denied those disappointments and unanswered questions fester into discontentment with God.

5th before long this unaddressed discontentment breeds distrust.

6th And this all turns into a slow growing disbelief and even disdain.

Unanswered questions, disappointments, denials, discontentment, distrust, disbelief and disdain... That is the pathway of offense for many. Its beginning was slight. No one noticed it. Not even yourself. A buried disappointment left unattended, unaddressed, unsettled—this slight deviation can lead to a great rift between you and God.

IV. But are some of the reasons we become offended in Christ?

Listen, I am going to try and not explain what Christ's motives and reasons are for some of the things He does and doesn't do that may offend us. Primarily because, I don't really know all the reasons why the Lord Jesus does what He does. Sometimes Christ will let us see a little of the reason why He has brought something into our lives... but in most cases He is content to leave us in the dark as to the full purpose of his methods and motives... He is a mystery to us all the way through.

One thing we can be sure of, He wants us to hold on to him, regardless of what we do or do not understand, regardless of what we do or do not feel and do and do not experience.

But here let me suggest some of the reasons we can become offended by Christ...

A. We can be offended by His disruptive claims on our lives... His commands and calls...

The Lord is a loving master but He is a master. He has a will for our lives. We are His own purchased ones. He bought us with His blood and saves us by the free gift of grace unto good works that He has prepared in advance for us to do. And much of his will for our lives... how we are to live and what we are called to do will seemingly cut us out of the action of this world.

- No shady business, no white lies, no crud language, no pandering for popularity, no mounting up treasure in this world... he calls us to live as pilgrim and temporary residents; when everyone else is actively pursuing the American dream we are to pursue His dream. He instructs us to live in tents when everyone else is living in solid houses.
- We may try and soften the picture and accommodate our Christian lifestyles to the current culture but when we follow his call it will take us away from this worlds comforts. Jesus said, *"Take up your cross and follow me."* One Chinese Christian who suffered dearly for his faith in Christ put it this way, *"Anyone can be crucified once but it is this daily crucifixion that I find hard."*
- The command of Christ and calls of the Spirit can severely cramp my style. If I don't yield that ground...if I don't continually surrender all to Him and His will, the Lord Jesus can annoy me in the matter.
- Ex. A person who likes to hear a hard hitting message that stabs at some area where they have not fully surrendered to Christ. They like the fact that they feel convicted. It makes them feel that they are still spiritually alive and viable. But if they don't yield there completely that message just become annoying over time. Until they will tire of that preachers message and think it unhelpful and so they will roll along for another stimulation from some one else.
- There are people in the Church who are offended with Jesus because He has not stopped asking them to surrender some activity, possession, desire, habit or right fully to him; and they have not stopped to fully surrender.

We can be offended by His disruptive claims on our lives

B. We can be offended by His apparent contradictions.

- Christ inspires us to service with great visions of ministry and impact and then he places us in monotonous duties.
- We come to him tired and he says to us "stop and rest a while" and then He immediately pours into our laps greater and greater burdens.
- He promises us abundant joy and we find in following him such an awakened sensitivity to sin and the worlds true plight that we are overcome with even more abundant sorrows. Even Jesus himself who said, *"I have come that they might have my Joy and have it to the full"* was called *"A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."*
- He who promises us the riches of heaven and has said that we shall inherit the earth sometimes dispenses to us very meager interest on that inheritance in the here and now.

We can be offended by these apparent contradictions...

C. We can be offended by the slowness of His responses.

We seek deliverance from temptations but our battles only intensify and often are barely won, even with the Spirit's help.

There come seasons in life that are many times a *struggle* and not often a *song*.

WE may spend years praying for that one thing, that one person, that one need and not getting any seeming head way and yet God doesn't release us from that prayer.

We can be offended by the slowness of His responses

D. I think we can also be offended with God over misplace expectations. God hasn't promised us things the way we expect them to come.

- A young woman gets married and has children and she dreams of only the best for them and only of the best little boys and girls. She tries her best to advantage them in every way to guide their lives from trouble and into a lives that will bless them and bless her. But then she realizes that God meant it when he said that *man was born to trouble as sparks fly upward*. All those hours choosing just the right name for her babies and she could have just named them all 'sparky.'
- Missionaries go to the mission field believing a great harvest is waiting for them there and instead of fields whitened unto harvest they discover hearts hardened unto God.
- A person thinks that if they just make their plans and then submit them for God's blessings that all will go well but God's plans are not their plans and all doesn't go well. They thought they heard God leading them to move to a new place and thought this meant God was going to give them a better job there and a bigger house there and less worries there and... well maybe God did call them to move there... maybe they did hear from God on that matter... But the better job and bigger house and less worries was their idea not his.

We can also be offended with God over misplace expectations

E. Finally we can be offended with God by the unreasonableness of His silence

It doesn't make sense when He is seemingly deaf to our prayers and heaven seems to be sealed off behind a steel curtain. Even for moments we could accept this silence but at times it seems to go on and on with no indication that God is even inclined to answer. We ache, and our hearts break but we still feel the weight of the unmet and the unaddressed. And we ask "why?" "Where are you God?"

Sometimes God seems unreasonably silent... I don't know why... He hasn't shared with us all his motives and methods... he is a mystery. Jesus is a mystery still.

Conclusion: Without understanding all that God is doing... there is at least one thing we know for sure that will result from trusting in Him in the face of these opportunities to take offense with Him...

IF WE WILL NOT GIVE OURSELVES UP TO THE OFFENSE, THE STUMBLING, THE GRUMBLING DISAPPOINTMENT THAT LEADS TO DISTRUST AND EVEN DISBELIEF WE WILL BE BLESSED...

These things are meant to be endured with thanksgiving. As we do this we are compiling greater future blessing for our lives. These small afflictions are working for us a greater reward in glory. **2 Cor. 4:17** *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding [and] eternal weight of glory;*

What is this blessing?

- For John the Baptist it was an answer to a cry he had made. He had said, “I must decrease and He must increase.” And Herod’s prison was a place God answered that cry.
- For the Disciples the trials they endured answered a cry in their hearts... they had said like Paul, “I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings.” And even as they suffered and became weak under the daily stresses of service and witness they experienced this miracle. That when they became weak He became strong in them. They learned that it was true what God had said, “Not by might nor by power but by my Spirit says the Lord.” They discovered in practical ways that God glory is gained through foolish things like the cross and like disciples who die daily to take the message of that cross to others.

Listen whatever your trials or questions the only sure and unchanging thing you have is God. Don’t let go of Him. That is what the Lord Jesus is saying. He is saying even when you are cast about in the seas of doubt and sorrow and disappointment... blessed are you if you hold to the anchor, if you hide yourself in me... I won’t change... I’ll be here.

Illustration: Mimosa is a biography, written by Amy Carmichael, of a woman of India in the early part of the last century. Mimosa had only one time heard the message of the creator God who loved her. She had never learned, until years later of His son and the work of the cross, but God did something wonderful in advance of that day. He placed in her a settled faith in Him. As she pursued that faith she was for over 20 years subjected to profound persecution and profound disappointments. She knew nothing of God’s word but the Spirit caused her to settle on one sentence of wisdom she had heard her Hindu father speak. He had said, “The one who has planted the tree will water it.” She took it as a promise that the God who made her would ultimately take care of her.

She would in her challenges regularly go into a root cellar in her home and there lift up the edges of her skirt as if to signal to God that she was empty and had nothing but that she was trusting in His provision. Then she would pray a prayer the Spirit was teaching her and say, “*Oh my Father, it will be well, it is well with thee.*” And “*Oh my Father I am not offended with you.*”