

Matthew 11:2-15

² Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples ³ and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" ⁴ And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵ 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. ⁶ And blessed is the one who is not offended by me." ⁷ As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸ What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. ⁹ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.' ¹¹ Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he. ¹² From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of Heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. ¹³ For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, ¹⁴ and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. ¹⁵ He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

In the Name of Jesus.

Are we offended by Jesus?

How would one be offended by Jesus? He came bringing blessing. Will that offend anyone? Will it offend us?

The blind are given sight, the lame are given strong legs. Who's offended by that? The lepers given healthy skin, the deaf given good ears—who can be offended by this?

Jesus raises some dead to life. This is time for rejoicing, not offense, isn't it?

The poor have the Gospel preached to them. Those impoverished in sin, those beat down by guilt, those wanting to hide in the bushes because they're covered in shame, to all, Jesus proclaims the forgiveness of sins; for all, Jesus gives a cleansed conscience.

Who's offended?

But when Jesus walks around Galilee, when he enters Jerusalem, everyone is offended.

The Pharisees and teachers of the Law, they're offended. They want Jesus done away with.

The Sadducees, they want Jesus indicted for crimes against the people.

The elders and scribes, they hear Jesus teaching the people, and they are ready to have him under lock and key, and worse.

Even Jesus' own disciples—is there not offense there? Peter hears Jesus speak of his journey to the cross, and Peter is offended. That's not the way this lordship is supposed to go; Peter didn't sign up for this! He tells Jesus it cannot work that way. Matthew 16:22:

Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took [Jesus] aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"

His own disciples end up being offended!

John and James hear Jesus speaking of being the servant of God who serves all sinners by giving his life for them on the cross, and they can't take it. They start making demands not about who can serve, but who can have the power. Mark 10:35:

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask." And [Jesus] said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory."

Jesus offends.

He heals the sick, gives sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, strong legs to the lame, healthy skin to the lepers, life to the corpse; he gives forgiveness to the woman caught in adultery, he comes to the home and gives honor to the one known for alcoholism, he speaks with respect and love to the broken. This is offensive.

He has no army, no weapons of war, no political party, no social movement; he's organizing no great march on the capitol, he's creating no new government programs to fix every known problem, he's taking no one's political power base, but he offends.

Jesus must offend. He must be offensive in the world of Jerusalem and Rome, of Pilate and Herod; and he must be offensive in our own world.

He must offend, even, you and me. Because we are in sinful flesh. We try to improve it, we try to make progress with it, we even try to cover it up, or even to divert attention to something else, but at the end of the day, we are in sinful flesh.

Sinful flesh wants to do many things which are sin, but there is one sin which rules over all others.

Sinful flesh wants, and is tempted by the demons, to be what it is, sinful.

What temptations afflict our life of flesh? For that, we only need look at the Ten Commandments. Love and honor of parents and family; parents treating children with care and respect; love for neighbor; serving neighbor with our gifts of vocation; upholding our neighbor's name and reputation, his wealth and possessions—we are tempted to place ourselves above all that and be more concerned with how these things affect us.

But the real temptation? The ultimate victory the devil desires? The thing so natural to our sinful flesh that it drives everything we do, and is the reason we are in our life of flesh offended by Jesus?

We want to justify ourselves. We want to use God's Law to make ourselves righteous. We want, deep down, to think we can somehow improve our lives, somehow make progress in our flesh, so that we can somehow stand before God in our own worthiness.

And then when Jesus shows up, we are offended.

Offended because, Jesus came to give gifts. And the one who is justifying himself lives before God not according to what he is *given*, but according to what he can *earn*. So gifts are an offense.

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. But the one who is chasing down his own righteousness by the Law denies that he is lost.

Jesus came to heal the sick and give gifts to the poor in spirit. But the one pursuing his own improvement in the flesh is not looking for gifts.

Jesus came to justify the sinner, to give the gift of grace. When the devil tempts us to justify ourselves, grace is the last thing we think we need.

After all, in our world, a rich man does not receive gifts from a beggar. Will Bill Gates receive gifts from poor man, will Warren Buffet receive twenty bucks of spending money from an unemployed factory worker? The sinner working to justify himself thinks he is rich toward God, and so he is offended to receive gifts from Jesus.

But Jesus came to justify the sinner, to give gifts to the poor in spirit.

If we think we are not sinner, then we will be offended by Jesus giving gifts to sinners. If we are not emptied out and poor in spirit, Jesus will be an offense to us. If we think we are changing our lives and becoming better Christians, then we will be offended by Jesus.

Jesus came to give gifts to those poor and emptied out, to those deaf and blind to the Word of God, to those dead in their trespasses.

[Jesus said,] "Blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

Blessed are those who live in sinful flesh, who are daily afflicted by the devil, daily falling to sin, and yet who hear the Gospel of Jesus who redeems the sinner and forgives all sin. This sinner, living in forgiveness and grace, can say, *This is my Lord.*

Blessed are those who hear and see Jesus distributing his Body and Blood for the forgiveness of sins, and instead of saying, *I'm working on changing my life and improving myself*, say, *This Body and Blood, this forgiveness of sins, this is for me! Let me eat it and drink it as my Lord gives me to do.*

Blessed are those who, while in sinful flesh, hear the Gospel of Jesus and say,

*Speak to me this Word every day,
Let me speak this Word of Jesus to my neighbor,
Let me commend myself and my family to my Lord and his
Gospel every night as I go to sleep,
Let me always know my sin and never be offended to receive
the gift of forgiveness and cleansing and healing from my Lord.*

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