

Why Does Jesus Cause Offence?

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn for a little to the chapter we read in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 11 and at verse 6. Matthew 11, verse 6, And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.

Now in the opening verse we find that Jesus is speaking here and it's telling us when, well, when he had finished instructing his twelve disciples. Remember he had sent out the twelve on a preaching and healing ministry and they have returned and he's speaking to them.

And Jesus himself was going out to preach in the cities. And it's in connection with this that we have this question that comes to us from John.

And I think we're all aware that there are two opinions with regard to that question from John.

Because the question is a very straightforward question. Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, Are you the one who is to come or shall we look for another?

And that's all tied into the text that we're going to look at at verse 6. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me. And so people have different opinions.

[1 : 1 9] There are two main opinions with regard to this question from John. Some believe that as John is languishing in prison and he knows that he's going to die and he was God's great messenger here proclaiming the way of salvation.

He might have, this is what a lot of people believe, that he hit a period of real doubt and depression. That he felt overwhelmed.

He ended up in Doubting Castle with giant despair. And many a Christian, that happens to them.

Because the moment that we begin to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, we are not to think that throughout the remainder of our Christian life that everything is going to be plain sailing.

And that we will never again have any questions or any fears or any anxieties or any doubts about our own salvation or the Christian faith.

Well, we know that that's not true. And some people are plagued throughout their Christian life with all sorts of assaults of different kinds.

[2 : 3 4] And it could very well be that this great man, and Jesus highlights how great a man he was. Verse 11 he says, Truly I say to you among those born of women, there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.

So that was some testimony that Jesus gives of John. And yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And we've also got to say, just completely by the way, it's not what we're looking at here.

It seems in some ways so amazing that this man who Jesus Christ himself standing, there says, this is the greatest. John is the, he, there hasn't been one born of woman greater than John.

John was set apart even in the womb. He was somebody who became, the Lord dealt with him, savingly in the womb. And he became such an ambassador for Jesus Christ.

And yet he's taken out of the picture. And he's languishing in prison. And from a human point of view, it doesn't make sense. And so often we find these things within Christian experience.

[3 : 4 0] There are things to us that just don't make sense. And that the Lord often takes his most useful, or apparently so, out of the way. And we wonder why these things at a human level just don't make sense.

Of course, there is another level at which John had to be taken out of the way. Because he was simply the forerunner of Christ. He came to point the way to Jesus.

And as now that Jesus had entered into that public ministry, John had to come off the stage. So at that level, now that we're where we are, we can understand to a certain extent what is happening.

And we believe that John was still exercising a ministry in prison. And he was exercising a ministry with Herod. Because although it was Herod who put him into prison, Herod, we're told in the Gospels, used to go and see him.

Herod loved to speak with John and to question him. And to hear what he had to say. So it's quite amazing what actually happened there. But anyway, here is this question coming from John.

[4 : 48] And people wonder, why? How come that this great man, this vibrant, powerful, completely focused believer, who proclaimed the Lord Jesus Christ, how is it possible that he could have doubts and questions about the Messiahship of Jesus Christ?

Is this, are you really the one? Or do we look for another? So how could that be? Well, back in chapter 3, when we find John prophesying, one of the things that he was saying, He who comes after me is mightier than I, whose sandals are not worthy to carry.

He baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand. And he will clear his threshing floor. Gather his wheat into the barn.

But the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire. So John was prophesying of the Messiah as one, yes, he was going to preach and he was going to gather his people in, but he was going to unleash fearful judgment against those who rejected him.

Now, of course, when Christ came, his preaching and his ministry was one of compassion, of care, of love, of forgiveness, of healing.

[6 : 15] And at one level, although there was going to be that, and John was aware of it, there was no sign of the judgment. There was no sign of the wrath.

There was no sign of the other aspect that John was prophesying that would be fulfilled in the Messiah. So you can see from a, at one level, how John languishing in prison and hearing all the reports of the Messiah.

And he's saying, at one level, he measures up exactly to the one that I prophesied about, but at another level, he doesn't. What we've got to understand about biblical prophecy, and I'm sure that many of those who prophesied, who were given the message by the Lord, didn't always understand what they were prophesying.

And very often you will find in biblical prophecy that there is prophecy for the near future, but there's also prophecy for the distant future.

That often comes together. And sometimes you have to look at it in this way and understand that the near future prophecy is a guarantee that the distant future prophecy will also be fulfilled.

[7 : 44] An example of that is when the disciples pointed out the temple to Jesus, and they were highlighting the magnificence, the structure of it.

And they were sort of saying, isn't that an amazing place, an amazing building? And Jesus said to them, I tell you the truth, the time is coming when not one stone will remain upon another.

And then he went on to give this long discourse about the end times, all the things that were going to happen before the end of the world. We know that the temple was destroyed in 70 AD, just a short time, not long after Jesus gave that prophecy.

But the end times is a distance. We might be much closer to it than we realize. But there have been 2,000 years have gone on since that.

So that is an example of the near prophecy, the destruction of the temple, and the more distant prophecy of the things that are to happen before the end.

[8 : 47] And you will often find that, that even in, like in the Old Testament prophets, you will find them talking about the Messiah. And some of what they're talking about is what happens, and to those who follow him, what happens in this world, but also some of it pertains to what happens in glory.

So there's the near prophecy and the distant prophecy. So it's quite possible that as the reports were coming back into John, that John in prison, languishing there, knowing he was going to die, that he was in a place where doubts filled his mind.

And he was down, and he was unsure, and he was uncertain. And so he sends his disciples to ask Jesus. But what we do know is, with regard to the prophecy that John gave, the judgment of Christ that is spoken of, he will gather his wheat in, and that's all going to be fulfilled.

We're told that Jesus himself talks about that. He says the time will come, and he says what he will say to his people. He'll gather his people in, and he'll say, enter thou into the joy of the Lord.

But it's also told us that for those who reject Jesus, the words will be given, depart from me, ye cushion, into the place prepared for the devil and his angels, into unquenchable fire.

[10:16] So the prophecy that John gave is absolutely true. This is yet to be fulfilled, and this pertains to the judgment.

So while John was prophesying, he wasn't able to see, more than likely wouldn't understand. That's always a question. How much did the prophets understand of what they were actually prophesying? And we don't know. God may have revealed to them personally a lot more than maybe we realize. But the fact is that what John was prophesying, everything was true, but some of it was pertaining to the here and now, and a lot of it was pertaining to the actual judgment.

So maybe John, as we say, is really down in the dumps, and maybe he's filled with doubts. And we've got to remember that a lot of the Lord's people, as we said that, Jeremiah, we find Jeremiah so down in the dumps.

We find Elijah so down. These were amazing, magnificent, powerful, zealous people for God. And so, it's quite often the case that God's people sink, and they lose, they lose their sense of purpose, they lose their sense even of God's dealings with them.

[11:34] Satan can have access to us. Sometimes the Lord will allow periods in our lives. And we find ourselves questioning things that we never questioned before.

Do you know it's possible that as a believer, you question things that you didn't question even as an unbeliever. You might have grown up in the church, and all through your life, you accepted, although you didn't accept the Lord personally, savingly, you accepted the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, every word in it, and you believed it, and you knew it was through.

Never questioned it, though you had never come to a personal saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. But since you have come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, questions have arisen that were never there before.

And you say to Yeshua, and that disturbs you, and you say, why? How come this sort of thing is happening? Because we have an enemy of our souls who is patrolling this earth, and he's going about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

And he will often plant that seed, that thought, a distressing thought, a disturbing thought, within our mind, and allow our mind to work away.

[12:52] And that's why we have to guard our minds and pray against these things. So that's one view that people have. The other view is that John didn't doubt at any moment in prison that Jesus was the Messiah, that he was always convinced that Christ was who he had proclaimed him to be and who he was.

But what John is doing here is he's doing this exercise for the good of his disciples. Because you've got to remember that the disciples of John felt a huge rivalry with the disciples of Jesus.

And when John was still ministering at the very beginning, and all the people had started to follow Jesus, we find the disciples of John complaining to John, and they were saying, this is not fair.

All the people are going after Jesus. And they became quite distressed over it. And that's why John has to tell them, no, that's how it's to be.

I'm only the one proclaiming the way. It's not about me. It's about Jesus. And again we find the disciples of John complaining that the disciples of Jesus didn't fast.

[14:13] The disciples of John, they fasted. They seemed to be more disciplined, more dedicated, and they took pride in that, and they were pointing out the disciples of Jesus, and they were saying, look at them, they don't fast like we do.

So it's quite possible that John is here saying, I have got to get those who are still following me, even though I'm in prison, they have to go and meet with Jesus.

And John was persuaded that if they went personally to Jesus, spoke to Jesus, because they weren't following Jesus, they were following John, if they went and heard from Jesus himself, then their hearts would be broken and they would go and they would start following Jesus.

And so there are these two opinions and you can work them out for yourself or think which is the one that you're most like, but within the Reformed theology, both sides, people will hold fast to one or other.

We don't know for sure. But anyway, we find that how Jesus deals with the question and it's so sensible. He doesn't say to the disciples, you mean to say, John the Baptist is questioning whether I'm the Messiah?

[15 : 30] Go and tell him, of course I am. What does Jesus do? It's very simple. He says, go and tell John what you hear and see. And he highlighted that the blind receiving their sight and the lame walk, lepers cleansed and so on.

What is Jesus doing? He's focusing their mind on the fulfillment of the prophecies, for instance, in Isaiah, like 35 and 61.

These prophecies that these men would know pertaining to Jesus Christ, the opening of the eyes of the blind and the opening of the ears of the deaf. All these things that spoke of the Messiahship of Jesus Christ.

And he's saying, go and tell John all the things you've seen and the things you've heard. And so what Jesus is doing is so wise, he's bringing them really to the word.

And then Jesus says at the end of that, blessed is the one who is not offended by me. And we often think, how could people be offended in Christ?

[16 : 40] Well, we know throughout the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, so many people were offended by him because of different things, different ways. The Jews were offended by Christ.

Yes, they were forced to marvel at his teaching because it's said of them, even his greatest critic said, he speaks as a man of authority, not even as a scribe's.

But as far as they were concerned, he was a nobody. You see, he came from the wrong place. He came from Nazareth. If he had come from Jerusalem, they might have been more ready to accept him.

But he didn't. He came from Nazareth, away up in the north. And Nazareth was a place that had a lot of mixed people, mixed race. There were some, what we would term, true blue Jews there, but there was a lot of mixed race.

A lot of the Jews that didn't get married. And so, Nazareth was a very mixed culture and mixed race. And, a lot of the Jews further south despised Nazareth.

[17 : 56] That's why you find Nathanael. Remember when Philip got hold of Nathanael and he said, we have found the Messiah. The Messiah, he says, wait. And when he began to tell him Jesus of Nazareth, straight away, Nathanael got hold of the word Nazareth.

Nazareth. Oh, he said, can any good thing come out of Nazareth? See, that's the way the Jews thought. And so, they wrote off Jesus because he came from the wrong place.

They were offended that this person could even begin to be thought of as the Messiah when he came from the wrong place. And, you know, that kind of thinking is sadly really prevalent in so much of our, even of our society, not just with regard to the gospel, but that people measure other people because of their background or because of where they've come from, because of their status, because of their wealth, because of their lack of wealth, because of all these things.

People make assessments who they belong to. All these kind of things. People, there's a, there's almost an inbuilt prejudice in a lot of people who will make judgments about other people purely on things like their background, who their people are, what they have or what they don't have, and that is so, so terribly wrong.

That attitude should never, ever, ever, ever be found in the church of Jesus Christ because one of the wonderful things about the Christian faith is that it brings everybody onto the same level.

[19 : 37] what can we boast, what can we bring that will make us be greater than any other person in the Christian faith?

Not one thing. Our standing in the church of Jesus Christ is in Jesus Christ alone and nothing else. And that is why we are all one family.

We are all brothers and sisters together in Jesus Christ. And that is something that is hammered home over and over and over again in the scripture.

All one in Christ. So that we cannot, nobody can parade their own gifts or whatever they are or whatever they have or whatever they've got in life or whatever.

These things don't come into it. Everybody is one in Jesus Christ. Again, the Jews were offended at Christ's education or lack of it.

[20 : 39] He didn't go to the rabbinical schools. There were great rabbinical schools, great teachers of the law. And it would be expected that the Messiah is somebody who would be brought up in these great schools and would be somebody of great educational authority and might and he would be teaching.

But Jesus, as far as they were concerned, was the son of a carpenter. And there's no doubt that Jesus growing up would have learned the trade of a carpenter. So he didn't go to the places that they would expect him to go. They were offended because of this. Again, the disciples that he had, he had chosen twelve that were going round with them. He had set them out teaching and preaching. teaching. They were his inner circle. They were his group. But he didn't go to the rabbinical schools. He didn't go to the scribes and say, right, who are the best that you have? Who are the best readers and teachers of the law? He didn't go to the Pharisees and say, look, I know that you're outward there's nobody in the land is so upright with regard to keeping the law outwardly like you. [22 : 00] I must get two or three of you to follow me. He didn't go to the temple and go to the priests and say, now, I will want the chief priest and I will want some of the senior priests to come with me. No. He chose tax collectors. He chose fishermen. He chose people who that elite of the Jewish society looked down on. Because that's the way it operated in those days. There were those there and those there. And they looked down. So Jesus had chosen as far as they were concerned the wrong people. And they were offended in Jesus Christ. And they were offended also at his teaching. Because he spoke to them about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. Of course, he was speaking there about accepting him, believing in him, and feeding upon him. And they didn't like what they were hearing. [22 : 59] You see, as we know, the expectation, and this had been taught down throughout the centuries, that when the Messiah came, that he would deliver the people. He would be a deliverer. And of course, the idea grew and grew, arms and legs, so the idea was when the Messiah came, that he would be an incredible person, that he would be, yes, a great teacher, yes, that he would have great miracles, but he would be a military leader, he would be a great politician, and he would, by his might, and by his political power, and by his military strength, he would deliver the Jewish nation from all who were over them. And at the very beginning, the people did think that Jesus was the Messiah. Because remember, after the feeding of the 5,000, they began to think, this is the Messiah. This is, they wanted to make him a king. But when he really began to teach them, and explain to them, and show them what it was to be the Messiah, to be a follower of him, and what his work was in this world, we find that they turned their back on him. They deserted him. They didn't want to know anything more about him. And so, we find that Jesus, on occasions, he said to them, does this, this was after his teaching, does this offend you? [24 : 42] It did. Because they said, we don't want to hear any more of that. There were moments, there was a thrill in their heart, this could be him. But then when they saw his way, his humility, his grace, his self-sacrificial way of living, his gentleness, his yielding, they didn't want that. That's not the kind of Messiah we want. And they were offended by him. But you know, it's still the same today. There are so many people who are offended, they look at the Christian faith and are offended by it. Now this word offended is literally to scandalize and it means to put a stumbling block or a snare in somebody's way. And that is what the gospel is to so many people. It's a stumbling block. Paul himself writing said that very thing. He said the gospel is to the Jew a stumbling block and to the Greek or to the Gentiles foolishness. And to this very day, that's exactly what it is. it's a stumbling block still to the Jewish nation. This gospel. Because they're still waiting for the Messiah. [25 : 55] They're still waiting. So many of these Orthodox Jews, they are still waiting because they have not accepted, down throughout the centuries, they have not accepted the report of the Bible. Because way back then, that's why they put Jesus Christ on the cross. they were convinced he was an imposter. And that all came about because of their prejudice. See, all the time they were saying to Jesus, give us a sign. If you do something, give us a sign. Do something. And if you do something, we'll believe. Well, all the time Jesus was doing. Opening the eyes of the blind and cleansing the lepers and restoring the paralyzed. That was a sign. That was part of what the prophecies had said.

These were men, we've got to remember, who were schooled in the law. They knew some of them could recite it backwards almost. And still they refused to believe.

[26 : 57] Lazarus was four days in the grave. Jesus brought him back to life. We want a sign. Do something. Was there ever anything ever in the history of this world greater than that sign?

Yet they wouldn't believe. What did they want to do with Lazarus? They wanted to put Lazarus to death because Jesus had raised him from the dead. Because many of the Jews began to believe in Jesus. Do something.

Give us a sign. Oh, we don't like that sign. In fact, because of what you did, we're going to put that man to death. Does that not show the blinkered, bigoted prejudice that was within their heart?

And they were offended in Christ. And that desire for a sign went all the way to the cross because when Jesus hung on the cross, they were still wanting a sign.

Come down, they said, from there, and we'll believe in you. Even if he had come down, they wouldn't. because they had every sign that was there for them.

[28 : 10] And you know, it's still the same today. Jesus is still an offense to so many people. How? This way. Because Jesus says to us through his word, you know something?

You're not good enough. The only way to get to heaven is through me. And people are offended. What do you mean I'm not good enough?

That's a natural response to the Bible. There's so many people who hate that message. An awful lot of people would love a social gospel. And that is simply this.

Be as good as you can. People will pick out some of the teachings of Jesus and say, right, I'm going to live like that. And that's admirable. Of course, it's good that we would try and live according to the ways of Jesus.

And people will say, well, if somebody is bad to me, I am not going to respond and be bad to them. I'm going to be forgiving in spirit. And I'm going to do all these things and live according to Christ's teaching.

[29 : 17] And people will say, well, that will do me. That will get me to heaven. Jesus said, no, it won't. only faith in me, only accepting me.

There's no other way. Your own righteousness in my sight, this is the word of the Lord, is as filthy rags. And people are offended at that.

I've heard of particular churches, not in our own denomination, but particular churches that might have had a very liberal ministry where, although the Bible was taught, the way of salvation and the hopelessness of our situation and of Christ being the only way of salvation hadn't been taught.

And then a new ministry comes in that begins to teach that. And loads have left because they've been offended at what they're hearing. How dare that man come in here and tell me that I am a sinner, that I am going to hell.

I'm a good person, I'm a good citizen. I come to church, I do this, I do that, I, I, I. And they're offended. It's still the very same today. People are offended in Christ.

[30 : 40] And in fact, even in society at large. Ted Turner, who founded CNN, the big news, the cable television in America, one of the great media moguls, and he at one point said, Christianity is for losers.

He looked at Christ and looked at someone dying on the cross. Everything about him was shame. And he said, those who follow Christ, they're losers in this life.

Apparently, he has since renounced, or he's rejected that statement that he made when he was a lot younger, which was good to hear. But that's the philosophy of so many people.

They think that Christianity is about losers. It's offensive. Who wants to follow somebody who died like that? Who wants to be a nobody in this world?

Jesus, what does he say? Take up your cross. Deny yourself and follow me. No thanks, people say.

[31 : 48] I find that offensive. And still, to this very day, people are perishing because they're offended by the message of Christ.

But Jesus says, blessed, blessed is the one who is not offended in me. And that blessing is on every person who says, you know, Jesus is for me.

I'm on Jesus' side. I want Jesus as my Lord and my Saviour. Jesus, that person is blessed. And the blessing of God makes rich and it adds no sorrow.

And you know, when God begins to bless you, he will bless you forever and ever. Not only in the here and now, but throughout an endless eternity. Your life under the hand of God's blessing is the

most privileged, wonderful place to be.

There is nowhere else in this world the equivalent of having God's goodness and mercy, which is part of this blessing, following you all the days of your life.

[32 : 58] Can you think for a moment and you say, right, what could I have that I would really love to have in this life for the rest of my life? And you would be offered, supposing there was a game, the generation game, and there was a conveyor belt went back with loads of different things and you had to try and remember them and pick them.

Well, supposing there was something like that went past and there were huge, wonderful prizes, wonderful things that you could have. But accompanying this, the alternative was you could have God's goodness and mercy following you all the days of your life.

What would you pick? Surely it would be that one. That encompasses everything. And to have God following you with his goodness and his mercy all the days of your life and then the promise of dwelling in the house of the Lord forever, it makes all the other things of life irrelevant.

And that is what the Lord is saying, you know, blessed is the one who is not offended in me. Let us pray.

Oh Lord, we give you thanks today for the clarity of the gospel and yet sometimes even for the offense that is in the gospel. We know that there are, even to this day, many people who are offended because of Jesus Christ.

[34 : 37] They are offended because of the message. But we give thanks, oh Lord, that you are the God who in your great mercy breaks down, breaks down hearts, breaks into people's lives to enable them to see their folly, enable them to see that it is so wrong to be fighting against you.

Oh Lord, we give thanks for the fact that you have been merciful to us. Bless us all here and may we all delight in you, may we all love you, may we all want to belong to you.

Take us to our home safely, we pray, for giving us our sin in Jesus name, Amen.