

Not Offended

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 March 2019

Preacher: Rev. Calum Macdonald

[0 : 00] I'd like us to turn now for a short while to the passage that we read, Matthew chapter 11.

We read from the beginning. When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities.

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 Jesus answered them, 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 to preach to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.

[1 : 10] Particularly the words, blessed is the one who is not offended by me. John the Baptist is described in many different ways.

Some talk of him as the bridge figure that spans the two points between the Old Testament and the New.

The link between the Old Testament and the New. We know that the scripture tells us that his ministry was preparatory.

That he was the forerunner. The one who was to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus Christ. And his preaching was a preaching that had at its heart the words, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

He had a large following. We're not sure, and I can't say that I came across any certainty of the number of disciples that he had.

[2 : 34] Some suspect that he even had more followers than the Lord Jesus Christ. He was a formidable character. You can imagine the description that we have of him.

Just a physical description is sufficient to alert us to the fact that people would be drawn to him. What he had to say cultivated interest in him.

And I suppose inevitably people followed him. Those who were spiritually minded suspected no doubt that there was more to him than was outwardly obvious.

If they understood the scripture or had any knowledge of the scripture, they may have thought that John the Baptist was someone of great significance in whatever way they understood that to be so. But at this point in his life he is in prison. And the reason for his imprisonment is that he has offended Herod, the tetrarch.

[3 : 54] He has challenged him as to his morality. And he's pointed out his accountability to God because of that.

And for his endeavours he is sent to prison. And he sends a message to Jesus by way of his disciples and the message we read together.

He wants to find out whether Jesus is indeed who he suspects him to be.

Now the message itself has puzzled many. And there are many suggestions as to what John is intending by way of seeking the knowledge that he has sought from Jesus himself.

For example, various... And I would say that most of these opinions come from highly respected preachers of the gospel and teachers in their own right.

[5 : 15] And they voiced their opinion as to what John was seeking when he sent his disciples to question Jesus. I've selected four of them.

John had no fear, but his followers did. And because of the fear of his followers, he sought to address that by getting an answer from Jesus.

This was the beginning of John's own personal faith. John's own faith had weakened a little and it needed strengthening.

Finally, John's patience had failed, but not his faith. Now these are just suggestions. They're suggestions because people are puzzled.

Why did this man, who is so impressive as a preacher in his own right, someone who is so knowledgeable that he is in his ministry clearly evidencing inside information, if you like, that he is on the fringes of something remarkable, that someone is coming and he is but a harbinger of that. [6 : 48] He is someone who is just going to open the road for this person. And how could he end up in a situation where he wants to find out whether this person is Jesus or not?

Well, we have to look at the answer that Jesus gives. And Jesus, he does one thing.

We did, we saw it in the morning. We saw how constantly the Lord Jesus Christ points us in the direction of his own word.

Points us to the truth in order to gain access to the truth. And the fact of the matter is that situationally, it's very difficult for us just now for us to imagine the spiritual temperature of that time. We have historically seen a period between the two Testaments where God was virtually silent.

[8 : 18] He had little to say to the world. And there was a time there when people were maybe slumbering.

And you couldn't say that there's much that is said to us about God working in the world in an identifiable way.

That's not to say he wasn't. But in comparison with what had gone before and in comparison with what was going to happen, there was virtual silence.

But now, with the New Testament era beckoning, there was clearly a stimulus to interest.

You know, when you think about the birth of Jesus and you read there about the life of those who were waiting patiently for the coming of the Messiah.

[9 : 25] And the faith that was required for these individuals to exist, anticipating the arrival in the world of the one that they were longing to see.

And we were just, you're just trying to figure out, trying to understand what the spiritual temperature of the age was.

And John is at the centre of that. And the centre of what John was looking towards is the promised Messiah.

The Old Testament was full of God's word directing attention to the one who was to come.

The one who was to be the saviour of the world. The one who was going to address the problem of sin in the world. And the scripture was pointing them to the Messiah and things that were true of the Messiah.

[10 : 35] Now, when Christ responds to John, his question is really, are you the Messiah?

We've been waiting for you. If you are he, well, surely you'll tell us if you are he. Are we on the right track?

Are we in the right place? Are you really the person that we're waiting for? That's really what's at the heart of John's dilemma.

Some people think that his imprisonment has taken away from his faith. And his imprisonment has deprived him of any confidence that he has.

That what he has been doing hitherto has been of any merit. But he was the forerunner. He was the person that God had entrusted with a specific message concerning the passion of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[11 : 36] Now, the question some people have is, well, has John lost his faith? But Jesus responds to the question, whoever is going to benefit from it, whether it's John or his disciples or the world around, the answer that he gives is from his own word.

And he reminds John of what the word says about himself. There are several quotations that come from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

In Isaiah 29, In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.

Isaiah 35, verse 4, Behold, your God will come to save you. 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 so on.

Chapter 61, The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

[12 : 54] He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and so on.

All Jesus has to do is remind John of what the scripture is saying. And he reminds John of what the scripture is saying by telling him through the disciples, this is what you're seeing.

This is the scripture being fulfilled. And John needs to hear that. John needs to understand that.

Well, the part I want to focus on, particularly this evening, is this statement that Jesus makes, which is in keeping with everything else that is said.

John can understand that these elements all testify to the reality of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[14 : 13] He is who he says he is, and the evidence is there for all to be seen. But there is also this part that we need to understand is equally true.

And it is found in verse 6 there. We see it in these words. Blessed is the one who is not offended by me.

And it's an interesting statement in many ways. But it's at the heart of who Jesus is and how people respond to him.

So I want us to think very briefly about the offense that Jesus causes. It wasn't something that was simply restricted to the time of John the Baptist.

It is something that is connected with the passion of the Lord Jesus Christ. That Jesus, because of who he is, will offend.

[15 : 26] Jesus, because of who he is, will say what will offend. Jesus, because of who he is, inevitably stirs up a sinner to respond because of the offense that's caused.

I wasn't terribly sure about the order of this, but I don't think the order is all that important.

But there's three certain things I want us to think about. The offense that Jesus causes by what he says. And what he says particularly about himself.

If we understand correctly what Jesus was saying about himself was grounds for John's confidence to be encouraged.

It is also plain that there are those who hear what Jesus has to say about himself that there are those who are encouraged by it but there are those who are offended by it.

[16 : 54] If we think about for example a well-known portion of scripture which I'm sure you're all familiar with again from the book of the prophet Isaiah Isaiah 53 the prophet there almost without doubt takes us to the foot of the cross and the description that he gives us is of a dying criminal and there's no doubt when you read these words in the prophecy of Isaiah that the person that is described there is dying and that he is dying for sin just read a few verses he was wounded for our transgressions he was crushed for our iniquities upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace and with his stripes we are healed by oppression and judgment he was taken away as for his generation who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living stricken for the transgression of my people and they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death although he had done no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth there's no doubt when you read these words that there's there's a broad opportunity for application and reference to the scripture that explains to us what these words mean but whoever that person is and I know who he is and I'm sure some of you know who he is

I believe that this passage is talking about the person of the saviour Jesus Christ but notwithstanding whether we believe that or not we know that the person of which that passage speaks is someone who the context suggests to us as being put to death his death is certain and the reason for his death is sin and the suffering servant of which this passage speaks about is someone who is the anointed servant of God appointed to suffer by God now when Christ applies the words of that prophecy to himself it is something that immediately people find difficult to accept even those who were his own disciples when

Jesus spoke to them about the necessity of his dying on the cross even without introducing into their thinking the element of the cross as the instrument of death the very thought that he had to die was something that he could not accept readily you remember when Jesus spoke to the disciples extensively about his death in chapter 6 of John we read there how Jesus introduced this to his disciples not for the first time but at great length he spoke to them about the need for his dying and he speaks to them things that they find difficult to understand but most especially they find difficult

to accept he says my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him as the living father sent me and I live because of the father so whoever feeds on me he also will live because of me this is the bread that came down from heaven not like the bread the father shaped and died whoever feeds on this bread will live forever

Jesus said these things in the synagogue as he taught in Capernaum now there's no doubt that when you read these words there's difficulty attached to them there's difficulty in understanding exactly and even theologians today when you enter into their discussions on what Jesus was teaching there there's a doubt in their mind as to the exact meaning of what he has to say but when you read on Jesus Jesus knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this said to them do not take offense at this then what if you were to see the son of man ascending to where he was before it is the spirit who gives life the flesh is no help at all the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life and again after this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him what he had to say to them about himself as this person who was to die for sin in order that the sinner may have life through him was something that he taught and taught regularly but to those who he taught it to it was offensive they found it unacceptable that such was the truth now remember he was teaching the disciples initially but what he has to say everyone must get to hear and everyone who is confronted with this truth as

Jesus taught it is not prepared to accept it because of the offense that it causes Peter refused to believe and Jesus said to Peter if you do not believe what I have to say to you you will have no part in me because without believing this without believing this truth concerning me if you have none of this I will have none of you and later on when he began to preach the gospel he the same truth was repeatedly brought to our attention what Jesus has to say about himself as the sacrifice for sin as the one who had to die in the place of sinners in order that those who were sinners might have life through him naturally speaking there is offense there to every person who comes face to face with it because of what it implies about themselves now maybe you're not one of them but most clearly you are wrong if you think that when

[24 : 59] Paul preached the gospel he made this point we preach he says Christ crucified a stumbling block to Jews folly to Gentiles but to those who are called both Jews and Greeks Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God now to this day there are those who out and out refuse to accept the necessity of the cross the divine imperative that lies behind the coming of Christ in order to go to the cross it is offensive to them because we know that what he said about himself stimulated anger in many and there are those who don't like to hear even in the preaching of the gospel today they don't want to have any mention of blood no mention of life being surrendered willingly in order that others might receive life through him so the gospel essentially what it says about

Christ is a gospel that brings offense to many the second thing that we can see here is this that very often we come across people offended by what Jesus has to say about them not just what he has to say about what he is in the world to do but what he has to say to those for whom he came into the world to do it many people are offended when he speaks to them through his word Jesus says and can't but say what the scripture says he is the scripture personified if you like he is the word made live he is

God speaking to us in in every possible way that you can think but he applies God's word to those who are before him and he can't but say to those who are before him that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God he has to say it otherwise his own reason is challenges his reason for coming into the world is suspect the reason for him being born the son of God becoming man is clearly something that is unnecessary if it is not true that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God if we go to Matthew's gospel for example and speak there the words of

Jesus as he speaks them on the sermon on the mount and he reminds us of of the damage wrought by sin the demands that being under God's law places under we find again and again through what Jesus is saying that by our own endeavours we will never secure life everlasting because we are constantly and repeatedly coming short of the glory of God if you go through the sermon on the mount and remind yourself of what Jesus has to say we're coming face to face with the fact of our own shortcoming and nobody wants to be reminded of that nobody wants to come face to face with their own inadequacies but that's what God's word does if

Jesus becomes personal to us it becomes worse you know we're all very happy you're quite content there saying well the minister is saying you're all sinners well fair enough everybody beside you is a sinner and you're comfortable in that place where everybody is the same as you and you're not really being singled out you're not being isolated but when Jesus isolates you when Jesus speaks to you about your sin your personal sin your accountability as an individual to God then it becomes harder to bear when Jesus spoke to the woman at the well of Samaria you can see how he interacted with her he spoke to her directly and personally and he delved into the innermost secrets that she thought were secrets and he exposed her heart and he revealed the true nature of her immorality and he dealt with her as an individual and as a sinner and if he had left at that she would have been deeply offended by the knowledge that he had offered and the willingness that he had to reveal it to whosoever but he revealed it with a purpose in view and when he comes as the physician of souls to an individual it is no surprise that as a physician he sometimes probes and prods in the places that we are most that we suffer most pain from you know if you need to go for surgery and you go for a pre operation examination from the surgeon and if he sits on the other side of the table to you and he hums and he haws and he looks at his notes and he doesn't do anything else you might not be too convinced that he's going to be doing anything but if he asks you to come and lie down on his couch and then he comes and he points his finger at where you think the problem is and he prods it you don't like the prodding but you know at least that he's in the right area and when he's going to put you on a surgeon's couch that he's going to do the right thing when [32 : 29] Jesus is dealing with a sinner in this way he deals with the individual and he deals with the individual's need and whatever the greatest need is he exposes it and he points to it and he reveals it to you so that you know that he knows and when he is about this business sometimes you think well what right has he to do this I remember you know sometimes ministers have to well they're under shepherds you know that they're sent out to preach God's word and I'm not sure if it happens as much today but I remember when I first started off hearing of ministers preaching and those who were sitting in the pews wriggling virtually under the preaching of the word I remember on more than one occasion hearing of individuals and they were convinced and no one would convince them otherwise that somebody had told the minister what was going on in their lives somebody had exposed their innermost thoughts to the minister and there he was standing in the pulpit and speaking about them to everybody but it was the

Lord the Lord was working through his servants and saying this is what's wrong and I know it's wrong and this is what must happen in order for this wrong to be put right and Jesus sometimes as he introduces you to the medicine of his own saving love he will need to hurt and he will need to wound and he will need to make you feel uncomfortable and that uncomfortableness will make you feel an offense because of who he is Jesus speaks so that people may be offended by what he has to say to them but always with the end view end in view that they will learn that what he has to say to them is for their own good the third thing and I'll just briefly say something about this that there are those who stumble and are offended by

Christ because of what is true about himself because of who he is who he is he is the alone savior of the world and not many people want to hear that if you say to a person there is but one savior there is but one redeemer savior and every single solitary soul in this world needs that redeemer and that redeemer is Christ that's not what they want to hear what do they want to hear well they want to hear there are many roads to God and you can pick your own salvation is not really something that I need to think about salvation is something that's an invention of the church salvation is something that only those who are saturated in the gospels need to think about I'm no better or no worse than anybody else but Christ says I am the way the truth and the life God's way of salvation is by way of the cross and it is Christ's way or no way at all why do I say that well the Bible says it Peter the apostle and Peter the apostle was someone who was in a very difficult school you could say it was the school of hard knocks but he learned he learned much in that school and when he was finished or when God was finished with him and sent him out to be a preacher of the gospel to others he was able to say that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers not with perishable things such as silver or gold but with the precious blood of

Christ like that of a lamb without blemish or sport he was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God who raised him from the dead and gave him glory so that your faith and hope are in God Christ

says you are in need of a saviour man says no Christ says I am that saviour man says no Christ says I don't care if you're saying no I am this saviour that God has given to the world you know there are many people and they have in the words of Charles Dickens great expectations great aspirations the kingdom of Jews thought that there was going to be a

[38 : 35] Jewish king the Gentiles would be their servants and so on and so forth and when Jesus came on the scene he didn't fit the bill he wasn't he wasn't a king he was a pauper pretty much he was impoverished a Nazarite a Galilean you read through there and you'll see prejudice through all their reckoning but Jesus saves sinners and that's the thing and that must be right some of you are not saved but you're working at it isn't that good you're much better than you were a year ago perhaps a lot more than you were five years ago or ten years ago well if that's what you think you're wrong the strange thing about the

Christian is that they're probably worse today than they were a year ago worse in what sense well in the sense that God has worked in their life to expose to them the need that they have a savior to expose their heart as something that's desperately wicked and that they are still discovering truths concerning their heart that they never knew possible and what has that done for them well it's done this it's taken away from them any foolish notion that they can in any way ever gain salvation by their own endeavors the longer lived the Christian is the more convinced they are of their own foolishness and their futility of their own endeavors at working out salvation for themselves and Christ says if you don't believe that that must mean that you are offended by what I have done you are offended by the truth that I teach concerning that heart that the Christian is discovering more and more and sorrowing over you're offended by that teaching you're offended by the thought that Christ will ultimately be the one before whom you stand at the last and give account you're offended by a great many things about Christ but it is still Christ that we will answer to and I pray that everyone here would never be so offended by Christ that you don't come to seek him for yourself that you may discover him to be the saviour that he has shown himself to be and that he proves himself to be to those who have trusted in him may he bless these few thoughts to us let us pray ever blessed

God we give thanks that even though in our experience when your word came to us and showed us what we were by nature we rebelled against that word and we were offended by that word when Christ came to us and spoke to us personally directly we were offended by that by that conversation by that dialogue and yet we give thanks that we ever had it and that you ever spoke to us in that wise we pray that whatever your word says about you that we would listen to and that we would not remain as those who are in the world and who despise the world and who will have nothing to do with

Christ as your word tells us there were those who who preferred someone else to Christ and who who desired to crucify Christ before that one Lord help us to understand the need that we have of such a saviour as your word descends to us guard us keep us protect us forgive our sins in Jesus Amen