

Title: “Do I Offend You?”

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Matthew 11:2-15

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Overview:

“Blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” Why would we be offended by Christ? The implications of answering this question in the negative are great and demand action by us.

Lesson:

When we decide to stand, we proclaim to the world that there is no show to leave from. We proclaim that we become part of the death and resurrection by association with Christ Jesus. And we become accountable for obeying his commands: to love one another and to share the gospel with others.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

This morning I want to let you in on a little secret: when I was just a teen, I dreamed of being a rock star. On a stage with millions of people - yes, I anticipated that the world would be forced to construct venues large enough to hold all of my fans - I would sing, and I would amaze, and I would awe. Wherever I went countless people would follow after me, hang on my every word, and imitate me in every way, well every way except being as awesome as I would be!

As you might conclude, the number of fans who would listen to me sing, and be amazed, and would stare at me in awe only ever amounted to four - and only during the first few years of their lives. Now, my children don't revere me quite so highly.

But, in my mind, I would have millions of followers who would stand beside me and congratulate me for any accomplishment and who would stand behind me and support me through any challenge and protect me from any harm. I would have followers who would shout on the rooftops that they were my biggest fans.

Never, in a million years, would I consider one of my million followers to be ashamed to know me. And all of this because I could, quite simply, sing.

In today's gospel we read about John. He was imprisoned and unable to speak to Jesus in person, so he sent his disciples to inquire about him. Was Jesus the one the world was waiting for? Was this who the prophets foretold? You see, John was in prison because he had been preparing the path for the promised Christ and he might have even believed that is death was imminent, and so he just wanted to know: had Christ come or was the world still waiting?

And the response from Jesus was profound. He didn't simply answer the question, dictate to John that he was, indeed God incarnate. Instead, he invited him to look around and see all that he was doing in the world.

“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.”

John could decide for himself. And there is a lesson in there for us as well. We, too can see the reality of God all around us, in his creation and in his work throughout our lives. But I would like to set that aside today and talk about something different, something that really challenges me and probably challenges you, too. In the next verse, Jesus says something that is unexpected. He says, “And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” What does he mean? He listed all of his amazing accomplishments just prior to that statement and he had large crowds that followed him. Go back to Matthew 4, just after the temptation in the dessert and we read that:

²⁴ ...his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them. ²⁵ And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

So, I ask again, why would they be offended? *Who* was he even talking about? In his day, he was talking about those that would abandon him upon his arrest. The disciples and all of his other followers would flee and deny their association to him. They would be offended at the very suggestion that they knew him! As he hung on the cross, abandoned by God, for *their* sins, they were nowhere to be found. And so, on that day when Jesus answers the followers of John, he blesses those that won't run from him, and that blessing is for us, today, as well. Do we hide our knowledge of him from others? Are we offended that we believe in a creator of the universe? A savior for our sins? Do we share God's Word with others, or do we reserve it only for our Sunday conversations?

But none of this really gets to the foundation of Jesus' statement. He was a rock star at the time and was performing far more amazing feats than singing. Why would they be offended by him? And for us, we know the rest of the story; we know of the work that he completed on the cross, his resurrection, and the salvation that he earned for us. Why would we be offended by him?

The answer, I believe, is deceptively simple: they viewed him as a rock star - someone who could perform for them. But, once they realized that it was all real, once they realized that he was indeed God in the flesh, they would have to face the consequences of that knowledge. Later in Matthew, Jesus says:

²⁴ ...“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Take up my cross, he says. Do unto others, he says. Love God with all of your heart and all of your mind and all of your strength and love your neighbor as yourself.

You see, once they realized - let's set them aside and talk about us. Once we realize that this is not a show that we can simply leave at the doors of the church every Sunday morning, it becomes very real and we are faced with a decision. Do we stand unashamed, or do we run away offended? When we decide to stand, we proclaim to the world that there is no show to leave from. We proclaim that we become part of the death and resurrection by association with Christ Jesus. And we become accountable for obeying his commands: to love one another and to share the gospel with others. And when we are asked about the deeds of Christ we can look to Jesus as our model and respond with more than just words. We can say, "See for yourself what Christ has done *for* us and *through* us. The poor are fed and the naked clothed." And they will reply, "Sure, but even the wicked do these good deeds." And we will respond, "See for yourself what Christ has done *in* us. We are transformed, from the inside out. We love the unloved, forgive the unforgiven and serve the undeserved. We spend our resources freely to share the love and forgiveness of Christ."

Advent is a time where we prepare for the coming of our Lord and Savior; it is a time where we can look back at the past year, and forward to the coming one and renew our call to Jesus to strengthen and preserve us in faith, and to fill our hearts with courage to proclaim him Lord to the world.

Let's pray.

In your name we pray. Amen.