

December 15, 2024

Luke 7:18-28

# “Blessed is the One Who is Not Offended by Jesus”

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The words of Jesus - **Blessed is the One Who is Not Offended by Me** - serves as the theme for this Third Sunday in Advent. What does it mean to be “offended?” The Greek verb used here is a word where we derive our English word for “scandalized.” We are truly blessed if we are not scandalized by Jesus. This word signifies either actively or passively causing someone to stumble or fall into sin. It has with it the idea of what we might call a “stumbling block” where a moral or spiritual suggestion becomes a hindrance to one’s relationship with God. More on that in a minute.

I am guessing that all of us have stumbled while walking. Maybe we were admiring the scenery while walking down a dirt path and our foot stepped on a rock or into a hole, causing us to trip and fall. Or maybe our ankle twisted due to the ground not being level and we fell to the ground. Falling and hurting our leg, hands, or knees is not a pleasant experience. But what happens if someone purposefully allows us to trip and fall? They see us walking, see the danger but did nothing or said nothing. It would be even worse if someone intentionally stuck out their foot to cause us to trip and fall.

The truths of Jesus can be a stumbling block. His gracious words and mighty works, which are always good, can become a scandal that causes us to lose faith. They can be an offense or an occasion to sin. Take, for example, the thought that you are forgiven for all your sins. Some people conclude that this is a great deal! Because Jesus loves to forgive much and we love to sin much, we should go on sinning so that grace may increase. Paul says: “By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” Another example of a stumbling block is found in John 6, when Jesus said to the crowd, “whoever feeds on me will live because of me,” and many disciples turned back and no longer walked with Jesus.

In our gospel lesson we have a stunning example of this sort of thing with John the Baptist and his disciples. John is in prison while his disciples are keeping an eye on Jesus. In our text for this morning we read: “The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’” What things had been reported to John? Well ... the things recorded beforehand in Luke. Immediately before our text is recorded for us the raising of the widow’s son. Before that is the healing of the Centurion’s servant. And we could add everything from this to the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. How can such great things become a stumbling block for the Baptist and his disciples?

The answer first lies in the preaching of John the Baptist. John vehemently warns of the judgment that is to come with the arrival of the Messiah. In Luke 3:9 John says that “Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” Also in the same chapter in verse 17 we hear the preaching of John, “His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” Contrast that now with the preaching of Jesus in Nazareth as it is recorded in Luke. When Jesus quotes the gospel in Isaiah 61, he leaves out the words, “... and the day of vengeance of our God.” And when Jesus quotes the gospel in Isaiah 29, he does not add what follows in that section: “For the ruthless shall come to nothing and the scoffer cease, and all who watch to do evil shall be cut off ...”

The stumbling block for John the Baptist and his disciples revolved around what Jesus was not doing in their estimation. In his commentary on *Luke [1:1-9:50]*, Dr. Arthur A. Just writes: “... the scandal could come because at his first advent Jesus reveals himself primarily as a Messiah of mercy, compassion, and forgiveness ... He has come to serve, to seek, to save. His ministry now is not to execute [final] judgment, but to *absorb* God’s eschatological wrath ... Blessed is he who sees that Jesus is the Coming One who brings mercy, compassion, and forgiveness!” Indeed. Many had a misconception of this, including the apostles of Jesus who immediately expected the kingdom to come and the world to end after the resurrection. They ask at the ascension of Jesus, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

As you can see, John and his disciples [and Jesus’ apostles] were not discerning a time gap between the ministry of the cross and the day of judgment, and this was shockingly causing them to call into question all of the incredible miracles that Jesus was doing - including - the raising of the dead widow’s son. This is how dangerous a stumbling block can be. It was no fault of Jesus, but fully rested on their inability to trust what was clearly in front of them and to relax what they did not know or could not correctly perceive into the hands of the one who will fulfill all promises in due time. Sometimes we do not know or we may not even be able to reconcile certain things, and this is an invitation for us to trust no matter what. Such are blessed!

Now, don’t get me wrong, it was not as if John and his disciples had lost faith. Rather, they had doubts from what we might call a weak foundation. Their reasons for faith were becoming weak because of what they perceived that Christ was failing to do, and their doubts began to plague them when they questioned the veracity of God’s Word. What is instructive for us is to note how Jesus ministered to these doubts. We read in Luke 7:20-23,

And when the men had come to him, they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’” In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. And he answered them, “*Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And **blessed is the one who is not offended by me.***”

John and his disciples are invited to hold on to the testimony. When we have doubts like John the Baptist, our malformed or malnourished faith must rest on the witness of Scripture. In the testimony concerning the person and work of Jesus, what is malformed is made right, and what is malnourished is fed. Again, Dr. Just comments:

By highlighting the miracles, Luke affirms that the OT is being fulfilled. Thus the teaching of Jesus is certified as messianic. When John’s disciples see the works of Jesus, they should interpret messianically both the OT prophecies *and* the teaching and preaching of Jesus since his sermon in Nazareth ... these are the same miracles Jesus promised in his Nazareth sermon

(4:18-19). Now, however, the miracles are more than promises because Jesus has actually been performing them for some time ...

Our wrestling with the words and works of Jesus as they come to us in our lives can be a stumbling block to us in many ways. For example, we are still waiting for the coming of the Son of Man. And what does the unbelieving world say to us in order to drive us to sin and unbelief with them? They say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation (2 Peter 3:4).” But they deliberately forget the flood and how the whole world perished. Not only that, they forget the first coming of Jesus and his death and resurrection from the grave for the forgiveness of all sin. They would have us to forget and dismiss everything that pertains to either our death or the last day. They would have us join in with their scoffing. Now that is actively scandalous - they actively stick out the foot for us to trip.

But we are the blessed who have been touched by the Holy Spirit to behold the cross and empty tomb and even prevail over what we may not know or completely perceive. The eye witness testimony of the Scripture and the sacraments, which wash our sins away and give to us the body and blood of Christ to forgive all sin and reassure us of his constant love as a foretaste of the forever heavenly feast, are able to put all doubts to rest. We hear of the cross and the empty tomb, and we trust that what is said in Scripture and all that Jesus has finished for us will be consummated. Even though for now, “... we see through a glass darkly ...” Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:12, we shall know “face to face.” Now we know in part, but then we shall know even as also we are known! Indeed! **Blessed is the One Who is Not Offended by Jesus.**

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott