

## **Blessed When Not Offended**

### **Matthew 11:2-10**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

Well, the Christmas season is in full swing. Everybody is in Christmas mode, whatever that is exactly. I think it means that people are in full: shopping for the right gift mode – baking all the right cookies mode – putting up the Christmas tree mode – getting all the Christmas decorations up mode – and whatever else people think of as part of their Christmas preparations, mode.

Along comes our text: 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 preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

“No, that doesn’t fit, it is not a Christmas-sy enough reading.”

“And the hymns we are singing are not Christmas-sy enough either.”

“Why does the pastor have such a hard time getting with the program, I think someone should call pastor and tell him that he needs to get on board with Christmas, and not mention of Jesus’ death in the Christmas sermon – doesn’t he know that isn’t the time for such things?”

Ahem, excuse me, hate to interrupt the discussion in your mind, but how did that snippet from the Gospel lesson end? Jesus said, “And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

When does Jesus offend? What about Christ causes people to be upset? Christ crucified! Paul declares to the Corinthians that he is determined to know nothing about Jesus, except Christ crucified. That message he proclaims, “the Word of the Cross” (1 Cor. 1:18) is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.

Do not believe Christ crucified is an offense? I have had people talk to me about the fact that I mention that a crucifix with Jesus crucified on it is a good thing to display. When I ask why, the most common response is, “Because He’s not on the cross anymore, He’s risen.” So, how many people who respond this way have Jesus in a manger in their crèche scene? He isn’t a little baby anymore either!

If you watched the movie Talledega Nights, there is a scene in which the main character, Ricky Bobby, is saying the table prayer. He prays to Dear Lord Baby Jesus! He asks him to use his “baby Jesus powers” to heal Chip. He continues, “Dear Tiny Infant Jesus.” His wife points out that Jesus grew up, but he comments, “I like baby Jesus best, and *I’m* saying grace.” And so he continues.

Even Hollywood gets it, this scene is a satirical lambasting of how some in Christian circle have twisted the Gospel into something inoffensive. You see, baby Jesus doesn't offend, but Christ crucified does. Jesus in a manger doesn't offend, so that's OK, we like Him better.

But let us be honest, when someone who knows nothing of the Christians Gospel sees an empty cross, they do not think, "Wow, Jesus is risen from the dead." If you look at a cross without knowing the story, it is simply a "T" – prominently displayed – and for no reason.

Christ's purpose in coming, His being born in human flesh, was in order to take our sins into Himself, and suffer and die for them on the cross. That has always been an offense. His closest disciples had a problem with it.

Matthew records an account for us. Jesus began to show 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 up on the third day. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid *it*, Lord! This shall never happen to You." But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." (Mt. 16:21-23)

But it isn't just His death upon the cross that is offensive to people. Many are offended by other things concerning Christ. There are many today who believe that no pastor should forgive sins, only God can do that. And yet it was Christ who gave that authority to those He sends out. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." (Jn 20:21-23)

Of course, there is the problem of the preached word being an offense. People want to be told what to do, how to live their lives. They do not want to hear a Law/Gospel sermon, they do not want to be led to repentance in the sermon and then proclaimed forgiven. That type of preaching leads people to be offended by Christ, probably because such preaching is just about Christ crucified.

But that is exactly what Christ has said should be preached. Just before His ascension, Jesus proclaimed, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. (Lk 24:44-48)

Still others are offended by eating Christ's flesh, it is why many who claim to be Christians believe that when you come to the Lord's supper, what you eat and drink only symbolizes or represents Christ's body and blood. Jesus said, "This IS my body... This IS my blood."

But this is not anything new. This was a problem as Jesus walked among the people.

Then the Jews *began* to argue with one another, saying, “How can this man give us *His* flesh to eat?” So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats 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 he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever.”

These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.

Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard *this* said, “This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?” But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, “Does this cause you to stumble? *What* then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. And He was saying, “For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.”

As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. (Jn 6:52-66)

But of course, this is also about Christ’s crucifixion, that is a part of what the Lord’s Supper is. You eat and drink Christ’s body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. And where was forgiveness purchased? On the cross. But every time you come to Christ’s table, it is about His crucifixion. Scripture proclaims, For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes. Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. (1 Cor. 11:26-27)

Why? Because His body and blood are present, they are what we eat and drink.

Those who are offended by these things, are offended by Christ. And while great gifts are given, those who are offended by them do not receive them. We need to repent for the times we have been offended, for these great gifts are ours if we but trust in Christ and receive them.

Dear friends, blessed are those not offended by Christ.

Blessed are those children who are brought to the font by their loving parents, for their, by the Word of Christ and water applied, children receive forgiven and are made children of God. Blessed is Abigail today, for she was brought expecting to be blessed, and so she is.

Blessed are those who believe and confess their sinfulness in order to hear a word of forgiveness spoken into their ears.

Blessed are those who are not offended by the proclamation of Christ, trusting that as they hear the Word they are strengthened in faith to life everlasting.

Blessed are those who gather at Christ's table, eagerly to receive His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins.

Blessed are you who trust that Christ was born to die for you, and was raised to justify you, and who believe that Christ present here this morning, and is blessing you now and into life everlasting. Amen.