

Offended by God: Observations from Matthew 11

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JOHN THE BAPTIST'S DILEMMA

When Jesus finished giving instructions to His disciples, He departed into the cities (v. 1). John the Baptist was in prison (v. 2). John heard of the works of Christ, and he sent his disciples to ask if Christ was the Messiah (v. 3). The reason John questioned that was because he was an Old Testament prophet. They did not see the church age between the Old Testament and the Second Coming. So John was confused. He was in a prison, a dungeon. Jesus was in the process of being rejected by the Pharisees. Jesus said to John's disciples, "*Go and report to John what you hear and see*" (v. 4). They were to report to John the contrary-to-nature miracles that Jesus did, and that He was preaching the gospel to the poor—two things that God would do (v. 5).

JESUS' EVALUATION OF JOHN'S DILEMMA

"*Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me*" (v. 6). Jesus made no attempt to release John from prison or to explain to John why he was in prison, just like the other Old Testament prophets, just like Job's suffering was not explained to him, and Paul's thorn in the flesh was not explained to him. Jesus simply reminds John of the spiritual evidence of the Messiah being fulfilled in Himself.

APPLICATION

Does God offend you? Probably not when things are going well. Wonder if you are in prison, like John, or in prison in a bad marriage, or a bad family, or a bad job, or a bad country, or a bad body, filled with disease or dying? If you think somehow you caused your imprisonment, then you don't have a sovereign God. If you believe your imprisonment (your life situation, your cross) is explainable by cause and effect in this life, then God is predictable. If God is predictable, then you control God. I suggest that God is completely consistent with His character but also unpredictable.

What bothered John the Baptist was that he could not predict what God was doing, and he was a prophet. Jesus said to not take offense or stumble over that. God is good, but God defines what is good. God is just, but God defines justice. God will do what's in our best interest, but God defines what our best interest is. Don't take offense or stumble over that. Read Isaiah 40:13-14. God is never obligated to explain to you.

JESUS' DECLARATION ABOUT JOHN

When John's disciples went away, Jesus began to talk to the crowd about John. Whatever meekness is, it is not a *reed shaken by the wind*, or someone dressed in *soft clothes* (vv. 7-8). John was more than a prophet in two ways: he was the prophet who prepared the way for the Messiah (v. 10), and he was the last Old Testament prophet (v. 13). Jesus declared, "*...among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than*" John (on earth) (v. 11). From John until now, the "*kingdom of heaven suffers violence*" (v. 12), like Herod who threw John in prison, and like the Pharisees who were planning to kill Jesus.

APPLICATION

Don't be offended by God, i.e., stumbling over what God is or is not doing in your life when you are in a prison of suffering without explanation. The disciples stumbled over Jesus sleeping while they were perishing on the boat. They thought Jesus did not care, He was no longer with them, involved in their lives. Jesus told them they had little faith. When you are in suffering situation, don't have little faith.

Don't respond to that situation by having less faith in God.