

Blessedness of the Unoffended

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of remaining unoffended by God through faith and confidence in His promises, as illustrated by the stories of Elijah and Elisha and John the Baptist.

Duration: 32:32

Scripture: 2 Kings 2:1-2, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 11:2, Matthew 11:6, Matthew 11:11, Hebrews 10:35

Topics: "Offences"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher begins by reading a passage from the book of 2 Kings, where Elijah is taken up to heaven by a whirlwind. The preacher then shifts to discussing the story of John the Baptist, who is in prison and facing a difficult situation. Despite his circumstances, John remains devoted to his calling and continues to proclaim the coming of the Messiah. The preacher emphasizes the importance of holding on to faith and not giving up, using the example of Elisha who refused to let go of Elijah until he received a blessing. The sermon concludes by encouraging the listeners to have confidence in God's unshakable kingdom and to seek a substantial and sure foundation in their faith.

Transcript

To read a very familiar portion of the word from the second chapter of the book of the Kings, the second book of the Kings, the second chapter, and it came to pass, when the Lord would take up Elijah by a whirlwind into heaven, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal, and Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee, for the Lord hath sent me as far as Bethel. And Elisha said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Bethel.

The sons of the prophets that were of Bethel came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today? And he said, Yea, I know it. Hold ye your peace. And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee.

The Lord hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho.

The sons of the prophets that were of Jericho came near to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today? And he answered, Yea, I know it. Hold ye your peace. Elijah said unto him, Tarry ye here, Tarry here, I pray thee.

For the Lord hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they too went on.

Fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and stood over against them afar off. And they too stood by Jordan. And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters.

And they were divided hither and thither, so that they too went over on dry ground. Came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken from thee. Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.

And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee. But if not, it shall not be so.

Came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, which parted them both asunder. Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. Elijah saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.

He saw him no more, took his whole of his own clothes, and ripped them in two pieces. He took up also the mantle of Elijah, that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of the Jordan. And he took the mantle of Elijah, that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah? And when he also had smitten the waters, they were divided hither and thither, and Elijah went over.

And when the sons of the prophets, which were at Jericho, over against him, saw him, they said, Spirit of Elijah, doth rest on Elijah. They came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him. Turn to the Gospel by Matthew, chapter 11, 11 and verse 2. When John heard in the prison the works of the Christ, he sent by his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go your way and tell John the things which ye do hear and see.

Blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings. Preach to them. And blessed is he whosoever shall find none occasion of stumbling in me.

In the letter to the Hebrews, chapter 10. Chapter 10, the letter to the Hebrews, at verse 35. Cast not away, therefore, your oldness, which hath great recompense of reward.

For ye have need of patience, that having done the will of God, ye may receive the promise. To revert to the old version of Matthew 11, 6. Blessed is he who shall not be offended in me. The blessedness of the unoffended.

You will know that the word there, offend or offended, so frequently used in different connections in the New Testament, just means a stumbling block. Literally, blessed is he who will not find me to be a stumbling block. Or who will not stumble at me.

Changed into the word boldness in the Revised, and we shall see why in a moment or two. The first thing then to take note of is that the word of God does take account of the possibility of our being offended with Him. It does not say anywhere that that possibility should never arise and will never arise.

The Lord has nowhere said that we shall never have any occasion for being offended with Him. He has indicated that there will be plenty of opportunity for so stumbling at Him, falling over Him, coming down because of Him. If you like, crashing because of Him will be plenty of occasion or opportunity for so doing.

He has never said it will never be so. It is well for us to recognize that temptation is never sin. We all are tempted in this as in many other ways.

And as you know, temptation is only another word for trial. So it is translated in some places trial. And there is nothing wrong with trial, with being tried.

If you like, with being tempted. And there will always be plenty of opportunity for being tempted to be offended with the Lord. The Lord sent no word of rebuke to poor John the Baptist in the prison when he was perilously near to being offended with the Lord because of his situation.

The Lord was not hard on John because of his question. He might, had he been another, have said, but John, did you not point me out as the Lamb of God? Did you not proclaim me as the one, the Messiah? Hadn't you preached about me to multitudes? Have you not made the strongest declarations and affirmations as to what you believed about me? And here you are asking a fundamental question about me. John, what's gone wrong with you? No, nothing like that.

The Lord knows our frame, we are thus. The Lord, I am saying, takes account of this ever-present possibility in our weakness of being offended with him. But he does attach to this matter a particular blessedness if we don't crash over this stumbling block of his ways with us.

And, blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me. There's the possibility. Then, as to the reasons for the possibility, I've read that old story of Elijah and Elisha, for one purpose only, just to get at one thing which is so common in our experience.

No new thought, it's often being mentioned here, but note it again. It's a strange story that, isn't it? Strange behavior of Elijah. It did seem that Elijah was trying to put off Elisha.

If you like to reject him, again and again he said, you stay here. The Lord has sent me. So and so.

You stay here. On the face of it, it looked as though he was being rejected. Put aside.

Not wanted. Just not wanted. And Elisha, had he been, what some of us are, he said, oh well, if you don't want me then, all right, I'll stay here.

I'll not go any further. Quite evident. You have no place for me anymore.

No room for me. I don't count. All right.

Well, sorry, but, you see that's pink. That's being offended. Doesn't it often look like that with the Lord? So often, the ways of the Lord with us could be interpreted in that manner.

The Lord doesn't seem to want us. He's no longer any interest in us. Indeed, he is relegating us to the place of the rejected.

Seems that he is prepared to go on without us. We are not wanted. That's what it amounts to.

We are not wanted. The Lord doesn't want us. You ever interpreted his ways like that? That's a form of offendedness or stumbling of the Lord, isn't it? Coming down by the strangeness of the Lord's seeming willingness to do without us.

To go on without us. To set us aside. Of course, that's not all the story of Elijah and Elisha or Elisha and Elijah.

We'll touch it again lightly in a moment. But there's one way in which we can be offended with the Lord. His seeming either loss or lack of interest in us.

And concern, real concern to have us. If we knew the truth about Elijah, he was far more concerned to have Elijah than he was to get rid of him. But he wanted him on certain terms, on the terms of a man who had demonstrated that nothing else mattered in life than fellowship with his Lord.

From that, he was not going to be put off even by the Lord himself. You like to translate the thing into relationship with the Lord. It would amount to this.

Lord, you may feel that you can do without me but I can't do without you and I'm not going to. You've started this business and you've just got to go on with it to the end. I'm not going.

May it not be that that is something of very great importance to the Lord in the relationship of a servant who is going to be useful to him. He's proved that his Lord is, after all, his life. He can't be shaken off.

Think about that. You have John the Baptist. Here he is in prison.

How uttered John has been for the Lord. How he has poured himself out in the interest of Christ. How devoted.

Behold the Lamb of God. Behold the Lamb of God. He it is of whom I said there cometh one after me the lachet of whose shoes I'm not worthy to undo.

He must increase. I must decrease. Here is devotion.

Devotion to his own abnegation. And now he's in prison. He's in prison.

His ministry is cut off. His popularity suspended if not ended. And in prison.

The Lord seems to be doing nothing about it. Nothing about it. I think there's something in this that when the Lord sent reply to John told him of all the wonderful things that he was doing in healing all manner of sicknesses even to the raising of the dead did he anticipate that if he'd stopped there John would have said yes, but why doesn't he do something for me? I'm the lone one doing it for everybody but not for me.

A lot of people are getting his blessing and good but I am left out. How easy it is to be offended when we seem to be just the one person who is overlooked. And just at that point because perhaps the Lord anticipated that that is how John might have reacted and blessed is he that is not offended in me.

Covered himself and perhaps helped John over his difficult style. The seeming indifference of the Lord and the seeming favoritism or present or selectiveness of the Lord. He's blessing here and there this one and that but he leaves me out.

Forgets me. Or when you come to the letter to the Hebrews pass not away your confidence which hath great recompense of reward. I'd stay with that word confidence just for a moment.

As you see it's translated in the revised version boldness. Because it's the same word that is used of Peter and John in Acts 4 when they stood before the rulers charged with filling all Jerusalem with their doctrine and they knew they knew very well what kind of a place Jerusalem was. What they had done in Jerusalem to the Lord Jesus the Spirit was there for their destruction.

That they stood before those selfsame rulers and it says about the rulers when they beheld the boldness of Peter John. That word boldness is the same word here as in the authorized confidence and revised boldness. What was it? Their forthrightness their unreservedness their absence of uncertainty.

Here they are they're not wavering they're not as we say speaking with their tongue in their cheek as to what will happen to them if they're not very careful what they say. Being politic diplomatic carefully choosing their words lest they cause offense or being very careful because they're not so sure of their ground. The word here confidence or boldness is this none of that they've got both their feet solidly down.

They are speaking with assurance and confidence they are forthright they are not reserving anything. And to the Hebrews the word is cast not away your downright forthrightness your certainty your assurance your confidence cast it not away it hath great recompense of reward. Now you see that you have to read the whole of this letter to the Hebrews in the light of that phrase alone that clause alone the whole context of this letter is over against much that was gnawing at the confidence of these Christians.

There was as we recently pointed out the persecution. The writer reminds them of their early days when at their beginnings they suffered so great a contradiction they suffered greatly at the beginning for their faith. Then they were confident bold assured that the sufferings had increased.

Persecution the activities of the Judaizers to undermine their confidence and faith in the Lord Jesus. The long delayed return of the Lord which they had been taught to expect at any time all eating at their confidence. These are some of the reasons for being offended and you can add what you like to them.

Probably find something in the word of God which corresponds to anything that you like to add. There are plenty of grounds and reasons for being offended. If you're going to be at the divine recompense and blessed is he that shall not be made to stumble or who shall not stumble be offended in me.

I ask you was Elisha justified in the end in sticking to it? Forgive me if that sounds vulgar. Was he justified in sticking to it? Shall we say to the bitter end? No bitter end of course. Of course Elisha had somehow a shrewd idea of what was going to happen.

I know it. He said I know it. I know it.

Hold your peace. But the point is that Elisha was not going to let go without getting something out of this for God. Getting something out of this for God.

He was the Lord's servant. He was Elisha's servant. He had got to carry on the testimony.

Great weight of responsibility was going to rest upon him. Because of that, for that very reason he was taken this testing away. Could he? Could he be put off? Could he be put off? Elisha teaches us a lesson so that we might learn it and be of the same spirit to hold on.

Cast not away your confidence which had great recompense of reward. Elisha found that to be true and came into it. His letter to the Hebrews lifts into view something very great at the end of the times of testing, doesn't it? What for? Receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken.

Or receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken. And what you and I perhaps crave for as much as anything in these days is something that is substantial and unshakable and sure and certain. The rock.

We are shaken. We are thrown about. Everything is like that.

Often to wonder where we are. Receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken. Let us hold fast.

Let us hold fast the beginning of our confidence from unto the end. Cast not away your confidence. Of course we ought never to speak of things in the letter to the Hebrews without seeing the full context.

Reminding ourselves of it. The almost infinite difficulty of humans as we are living a heavenly life and walking a heavenly way on this earth. It is so utterly contrary to our nature.

There is nothing in us by nature that helps us to walk a heavenly way. To have everything on a heavenly basis. Nothing at all.

Everything is against that. To come down to earth. To have what we can see.

What is tangible. What is present. Our whole soul life wants it now.

And wants it in our hands. Wants it as we can see it. And all this heavenly way of the letter to the Hebrews.

The heavenly way. Partners in a heavenly calling. It is unspeakably difficult to nature.

It is contrary to nature. And we find all the way along almost every day that this difficulty arises in some form or another. With all that we agree in our heart of hearts that the heavenly is the real.

And it is the only object worth living for. We've got enough in our spiritual experience to know that the heavenly is after all the only thing for which to live. Cast not away your confidence.

Which hath great reckonings of the Lord. You have need of patience. But having done the will of God you may receive the promise.

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