

Gathering With Christ

by Vance Havner

Vance Havner's sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting in Jesus and not being offended by His ways, even amidst doubt and suffering.

Scripture: Matthew 5:3, Matthew 11:6

Topics: "Faith in Adversity", "Trusting God's Plan"

Description

Vance Havner emphasizes the importance of not stumbling over Jesus, especially during times of doubt and depression, as exemplified by John the Baptist's struggles in prison. He highlights that even the strongest believers can experience moments of weakness and questioning, yet Jesus offers understanding and reassurance rather than condemnation. Havner encourages believers to trust in God's plan, even when it seems contrary to their expectations, and to embrace the 'Forgotten Beatitude' of remaining unoffended by Christ's ways. He reminds us that true faith is tested in adversity, and that we should focus on the blessings of belief without needing to see. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper trust in God's timing and purpose, assuring us that Christ is always on schedule.

Transcript

"Blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over me" (MATTHEW 11:6).

We are familiar with the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount. We are also acquainted with other beatitudes of our Lord, such as "Blessed is that servant whom his Lord when he comes shall find so doing"; "Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it."

But here is a little beatitude, short and sandwiched between longer verses, so that we are in danger of passing it up altogether: "Blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over me."

John the Baptist was in prison. That rugged, ascetic Elijah of the New Testament, prophet of the outdoors, was certainly out of place in a damp, dark dungeon. No wonder he had the blues. One day his feelings hit a record low and he sent a delegation to Jesus to ask, "Art thou he that should come or do we look for another?" Now, that was a serious doubt for John the Baptist. The very thing he had preached like a living exclamation point had become a question mark to the preacher himself. It was not the first or last time that a preacher's affirmation has become, in a dungeon, a preacher's interrogation. It reminds us of another prophet of the dungeon, Jeremiah, who cried to God from the depths, "Wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar and as waters that fail?"

But our Lord did not reprimand John the Baptist. It is noteworthy that two of the strongest characters in the Bible had something akin to a nervous breakdown. Elijah, in the Old Testament, collapsed under the juniper, and God had to feed and rest him. More than one Christian, exhausted, with nerves on edge, has imagined that he is the last survivor of the saints. And usually he needs not reproof but rest. Then here is John the Baptist of the camel's hair vestments and victuals of locusts and wild honey, who could reprove kings and call religious people sons of snakes; here is John the Baptist down in the dumps even as you and I! It is one thing to stand on Jordan and give it, another thing to stay in jail and take it!

But what did Jesus do? Did he bitterly reprove the troubled prophet? Did He say, "I'm ashamed of you, disappointed in you. What will people think?" He did nothing of the sort. He did not even send John a tract on "How To Be Happy In Jail!" On the contrary, on the day that John the Baptist made his poorest remark about Jesus, Jesus said the best thing about John the Baptist: "Among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist!" For Jesus knew his frame and remembered that he was dust.

John had preached a victorious Messiah with fan in hand, purging His floor, gathering His wheat into the garner but burning the chaff with unquenchable fire. And here was Jesus, not carrying on that way at all but meek and lowly, going about doing good. And John couldn't figure it out. The devil got in his doubts as in Eden. John began wondering and then worrying, for one begets the other.

Our Lord's answer to John's question is simple. The blind are seeing, the deaf are hearing, the lame are walking, the lepers are being cleansed and the poor have the Gospel preached to them. In other words, "I am running on schedule and carrying out my program as planned. It may not be as you expected but do not be upset by it."

This is a day of dungeons, and many saints are in the clutches of Giant Despair. There is comfort here for us. If a husky Lion Heart like John the Baptist could faint, "brethren, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial that is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." Your temptation is common unto man and there is a way of escape.

John's trouble, like most trouble, did not come singly, it was twofold. There was depression and there was doubt. Dungeons bring depression and depression brings doubt. Are you in a dungeon? Not behind visible lock and key perhaps, but while "stone walls do not a prison make nor iron bars a cage," it is also true that other things than prison walls do a prison make and other than iron bars may form a cage. Is your trouble financial? Maybe your blood pressure is up and your bank account down. Maybe you are physically ill but you keep going and everyone thinks because you are walking you are well! Maybe you have lost a loved one and a shroud of melancholy hangs heavy on your soul. Perhaps you dread to see night fall and search for rest as men seek for hidden treasure. Dungeons bring depression and from depression it is easy to move into doubt, even doubt about Jesus. Then we are upset and offended and we need to learn the Forgotten Beatitude.

It is nothing new to be offended in Jesus. More people have been offended in Him than in any character in history. Away with this milk-and-water preaching about Jesus! He has caused more offense than any other person who ever lived. He is either a sanctuary or a stumbling stone (Isaiah 8:14). He was an offense to His own nation and still is (Romans 9:33). He offended the Pharisees (Matthew 15:12). He offended the people of His own home town (Matthew 13:54-58). He offended superficial disciples (John 6). His cross is an offense (1 Cor. 1:23). And even true disciples may be offended in Him (Matthew 26:31-35). Sound

believers sometimes get into a dungeon and pout with the Lord and say, "It is vain to serve God, and what profit is it that we have kept His ordinances and walked mournfully before the Lord of Hosts."

Don't you look pious, for we all have done it! We have murmured that we pray and do not receive. We gave our tithe and now we are in adversity. We were faithful to the Lord's house and landed in a hospital. We prayed for our children and they became worldlings. We craved joy and peace but we are despondent. Across the street is an ungodly family that has suffered no loss, while our dearest was taken. "There is no use in praying. It reads very lovely in the devotional books but I seem unable to make it work." We were in distress, and the Lord "abode where he was" and when He did appear we grumbled like Martha when she said, "If you had been here my brother would not have died."

All such grumbling means that we have not learned the Forgotten Beatitude. Anybody can believe during fair weather. There is a deeper experience and a higher state which not many reach, a state in which, no matter what happens, we are never offended in the Lord, a state in which, whether it makes sense to us or not, we still believe Romans 8:28. Habakkuk started his book pouting and ended it praising. And blessed is the man who can say: "Though I don't get what I want: though I may sow much and reap little; though others get the plums and I get the sack, I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in the God of my salvation."

When Thomas asked for visible evidence of the risen Lord, he was asking for a smaller blessing than he already had, the privilege of believing without seeing, for "blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed." God wants us to trust Him, no matter what He does. There is a heavenly carelessness that leaves it all with Jesus and doesn't become upset when He does things contrary to what we expected. And there will be plenty of things that just don't make sense. John the Baptist must have wondered, "If Jesus can raise the dead, why can't He get me out of jail?" The little boy who couldn't understand why God put so many vitamins in spinach and didn't put them all in ice cream was already beginning to see that things just don't work out as we'd like for them to. There is much that is baffling, but if we can't understand it, by grace we can stand under it, we can see to it that we are not offended, and that is better than understanding it! Some things we are to know (Matthew 13:11) and some things we are not to know (Acts 1:7), and we would be happier if we spent the time we waste on trying to fathom the unknowable in learning the knowable.

God did not explain suffering to Job. He gave him revelation, which was better than explanation. Better than having all our questions answered is to say, "The Lord knows what He is doing and I will not be offended."

In this dark hour of world distress not a few believers are in the dumps. Jesus seems not to be carrying on as expected. The world is not being converted. Has Christ failed? He isn't transforming the social order. Is He the One or shall we look for another? Many have been mistaught and have misunderstood His mission, His motive, His message, His method. It is true that He is not converting the world. He didn't say He would. But He has not failed, He is running on schedule. Blind eyes are opening to the Light of the world. Deaf ears are hearing His voice. Lame souls are taking up their beds and walking. Lepers, like Naaman of old, are dipping in Jordan and coming up with flesh like that of a little child. The dead in trespasses and sins are awaking to Christ, their Life and Light, and to the poor the Gospel is still begin preached. Christ is carrying on as intended. He has never missed an appointment. He may seem slow but He is never late. We need not be offended because He is not converting the world. He didn't promise to, but He did promise to return in clouds of glory and reign until all enemies are put under His feet. Let us therefore take our stand on His Word and hide it in our hearts, for "great peace have they which love thy

law: and nothing shall offend them."

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