

*2When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples 3and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” 4Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. 6And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”*

*7As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? 8What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. 9What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10This is the one about whom it is written, ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ 11Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*

Just like Jesus to not answer the question. It was a simple enough question - could have been answered with a yes or a no.

I used to ask Randi Smarsh a simple question like that every Sunday morning before the 8 am worship: Randi, have you been staying out of bars lately? She could answer “yes” she has or “no” she has not. But every time I asked the question Randi would begin to blush and shake her head - sometimes her finger - and chuckle. I never once got a straight answer to that question – I do not think I ever will. Randi does not like what the question implies – that that at some time she had not been staying out of bars. Knowing Randi I know that staying out of bars has never been much of a challenge for her.

John the baptist while he was in prison heard what Jesus had been doing and he sent word to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” Now Jesus could have said, “Yes, I am the one.” Or Jesus could have said, “No, I am not the one – you should wait for another.” Either answer would have been very clear.

But this is what Jesus did answer, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: blind receive their sight, lame walk, lepers are cleansed, deaf hear, dead are raised and poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

It is like Jesus was saying to John: “You decide – am I the one you hope for or will you take offense at me and look for another?” At one time John seems to have been sure - when Jesus came to John to be baptized John said, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” And all along John had been telling the crowds, “I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Judgement – that is what John knew the Messiah would bring – judgement – dividing wheat from the chaff (the husks) – the good from the bad, that faithful from the unfaithful, the evil from the good, the guilty from the innocent. Who knows how John thought of that judgement but he seems to know when Jesus comes to him that Jesus is the one greater than John. But when Jesus went out and taught and touched there was no threshing – no separating the wheat from the husks. “Are you the one?” John asked.

“Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.” Jesus told him.

How could anyone be offended by Jesus? We tell the children that he loves them, and that he listens to them, and that he will forgive them and save them. How could anyone be offended by that message?

I remember a woman who told me about her brother. He would come into the room where she was and go like this. That was the signal that she was to follow him up the stairs where he would have his way with her. For years it went on. She told her mom – her mom told her that is the way men are. She cried with her sister about it – until she was in her seventies only her sister knew. Then she told me. As we talked the fact that her brother was a respected member of his church was one of the hardest things for her. He had never repented – never told her he was

sorry yet week after week he heard how Jesus loved him and would forgive him and save him. And she wondered, “Where is the judgement?”

Maybe that is what John wondered too. Maybe he wondered why Jesus was not down at Herod’s palace protesting John’s arrest - joining John in speaking out against Herod’s marrying his brother’s wife. John’s declaring that Herod was wrong would cost him his life – how could Jesus not even say a word about Herod being wrong?

Instead Jesus was teaching, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and send rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your sisters and brothers what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

No wonder Jesus said, “Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

I am on the side of the woman who wanted judgement for her brother. His pastor should have taken him and shaken him and said, “You are going to hell unless you feel sorry about what you did to her.”

And the same for the people who sell the weapons that lead to the slaughters in Africa and the suicide bombings in Iraq. And what about the ones who kill in drug wars in Cleveland and people who rip off the school board there for their own profit while the children suffer and what about parents who do not protect their children and raise them properly. I will bet we could come up with quite a list today of people who deserve nothing but judgement. But Jesus says that we are to be perfect like our heavenly Father who makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and send rain on the just and on the unjust.

And he says, “Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

Jesus is talking to me and to you – not to sit in judgement of them – whoever they may be but to hear and do what Jesus speaks to us. That will give us plenty to do to keep us busy. Amen.

