

A Rock in the Road

The form of recreation I enjoy most is probably 4-wheeling. I love putting the top down on a Jeep and driving through the mountains on 4-wheel drive roads.

Several years ago we were in my father's full-sized pickup on our way up the road that goes up Mount Princeton – well above tree line. The final stretch of road, after a lot of switchbacks, cuts across an avalanche chute in a very narrow section.

I think there were at least 5 of us in the cab, so we were squished in there pretty good, and I was next to the passenger door. My dad was driving.

It was a very nerve-racking experience, because it's such a rocky road, and the rocks are round. So the truck would often roll off of them to the side.

As I looked out my window, I couldn't see the road – that's how close we were to the edge. When I looked down all I could see was the steep drop-off. And I remember wondering what it would be like if we bounced off – how many times we would roll

before we finally hit the trees about 1000 feet below.

I was thinking about how my side would be the first to hit the ground, and so I would have no chance to jump free – and just then we encountered a big boulder that had rolled down into the road, blocking our path.

But we really wanted to get to the top, so dad attempted to get around the boulder while trying his best to keep all 4 wheels on the narrow road.

It seemed to me that there wasn't quite enough room, and I was imagining what it would be like if one of the wheels dropped off the side of the road, and just then...

CLUNK! The right front wheel dropped off! The entire truck tipped at a drastic angle so everyone in the cap was crushing me against the door, and I was looking straight down the mountain, and I thought "This is it. We are going over!"

And right then CLUNK! The back wheel dropped off, and the truck as tipped at what seemed like an impossibly steep angle.

And as I braced myself for the first impact against the rocks, I

felt the truck lurch forward as dad gunned it and, amazingly somehow managed to steer back safely onto the road.

So we got to the top, and what an exhilarating experience! It was a scary ride up, but what a beautiful place.

It seems like you can see forever up there.

You can look to the east and see over the Arkansas valley, right over top of the mountain range on the other side into South Park, which extends for miles.

Looking to the South you see the massive Mount Antero, another 14,000 peak that is part of the Continental Divide, and it looks like you could reach out and touch it.

And the best view of all is off the back side toward the West, where you look down and see a plush valley with a road and a stream winding up through the valley and steep mountains on each side...breathtaking.

Getting past that boulder in the road was a

challenge, but it was worth it.

4

The heart of this passage is v.23

Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.

fall away (KJV is not offended, NAS does not stumble)

Any time you have a word that is translated with that kind of variety you know it's going to be an interesting word, because falling away, being offended and stumbling are three different things.

The word is *skandalizo*. In Scripture, it means to run into a barrier or obstacle and be repelled by it and turn back.

It's like when you're driving on a mountain road and come across a boulder in the road and say, "It's not worth trying to get around it – I'm turning back."

5

If that happened you would be *skandalizo*ed, and the rock itself would be called a *skandalon* (the noun form).

So when Jesus said, **Blessed is the man who is not *skandalizo*ed by Me** He was saying, "Blessed is the man who sees Me as an obstacle – a big boulder in the road, but who is not repelled – he keeps going.

In our path toward God there are rocks in the road – obstacles that threaten to stop us, difficulties and trials that the Lord uses as tests and Satan uses as temptations, and the Lord says, "Blessed is the man who keeps going and is not turned away by those barriers."

He's blessed, because that road is the only way up the mountain. And so if you are turned back by the obstacle, you just don't get to go.

6

Let me give you a few examples of how the word is used in Scripture:

In Mt.13 Jesus was still in the early part of His ministry, and He went to Nazareth, where He grew up, and preached.

Matt 13:54 **Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed.**

At this point the people are very favorable toward Jesus. They are on the right track, and they are moving up the road just fine, but then...a *skandalon*. They run into a boulder in v.55.

55 "Isn't this the carpenter's son? That's a barrier for them. Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his

brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? 56 Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" 57 And they took offense (were *skandalizo*ed by) at him.

They couldn't imagine the Messiah could be some local.

7

In Mt.26 Jesus announced to His disciples that they were going to be *skandalizo*ed and turn away, and in v.33 **Peter replied, "Even if all fall away (are *skandalizo*ed) on account of you, I never will be *skandalizo*ed"**

"No obstacle could ever turn me back. I can get past anything.

Mt.13:21 **But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes (barriers – *skandalons*) because of the word, he quickly falls away (is *skandalizo*ed).**

TT Jn.6

Jesus often placed barriers in people's way to intentionally make it difficult for them to believe.

He did that for this reason: it was to expose the genuineness or lack of genuineness of their faith

– to show them if their faith was real or phony.

So whenever people came to Him He would place a barrier in front of them, because the only way past the barriers Jesus set up is genuine faith. Phony faith or inadequate faith can't get past.

John 6:53 **Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. (I require full-blown, total acceptance of Me)**

60 On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard (rigid, unbending, narrow) teaching. Who can accept it?

(Remember – there are His disciples, the ones who supposedly believe in Him).

61 Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this *skandalizo* you?

63 ...The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. 64 Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him.

Jesus knew some of them didn't have true, enduring

faith, and He wanted to weed those out of the group, so He purposely makes this extreme, hard, difficult to take statement for the very purpose of repelling those people who were repellable.

He wanted to show them that their faith was inadequate, so He used that statement as a *skadalon*.

And it worked.

66 From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. Jesus put up a barrier, and succeeded in weeding out the ones whose faith wasn't real.

TT Mt.15

At the conference we just attended last week it was harped on *ad nauseum* that we need to make it our highest priority to adapt to our culture so we can reach them.

But you don't see Jesus doing a whole lot of that. In fact, instead of always adapting to cultural prejudices and sensitivities, sometimes He purposely offended people in those very areas as a *skandalon*.

Keep in mind, the "traditions of the elders" - rituals like clean and unclean foods, and ceremonial hand washing –

those rituals were everything to the Pharisees. Nothing in the world was more important to them.

11

And Jesus taught His disciples to break the traditions of the elders. In Mt.15 they confronted Him on it.

Mt.15:1 Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, 2 "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!"

Jesus didn't respond by saying, "Oh excuse Me. I'm sorry. I realize that is a very important part of your culture..."

No, He rebuked them. And He lit into them pretty good -

3 Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?...7 You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: 8 "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me...

10 Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen and understand. 11 What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,'

12

First Jesus calls them hypocrites, then He takes not only their precious traditions, but even the biblical command of God about unclean foods from the OT, and without preparing them in any way emotionally, without any warning, without warming up to the idea, just throws the entire system of clean and unclean food established by God Himself in the OT right out the window in one sentence.

"You guys are hypocrites, and you know what – that whole thing about clean and unclean foods, as of right now, is cancelled."

That would be very difficult to accept. You would really have to trust Christ and believe Him to be God in order to be able to handle that.

Look at v.12. The disciples really want to help Jesus out.

12 Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended (skandalisoed) when they heard this?"

"Don't you know that turns them off when you call them hypocrites?" (They are giving Jesus a lesson on how to be more seeker-sensitive)

"You will never win them that way! That approach is never going to work."

"Don't you know that their traditions are more precious to them than anything? If you put an obstacle like that in front of them, it will repel them. Don't you realize that?"

"It's not seeker-sensitive. Don't you know that's not going to make people feel safe and comfortable, and is likely to cause them to turn away for good?"

Jesus: "That's exactly the point. That's the very reason I did it."

13 He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. 14 Leave them; they are blind guides.

14

"I purposely put that obstacle in their way to repel them to prove there are phonies. They are just going to be ripped up by the roots because they are nothing but weeds, they are blind guides so just leave them alone."

Jesus places barriers in front of people for the purpose of repelling those whose faith is not adequate, and to validate and strengthen the faith of the ones whose faith is real.

Almost every time someone comes to Jesus we see Him put up some barrier.

Rich Young Ruler – sell everything you have (that was a *skandalon* and he was *skandalizoed* by it – it turned him away.

Woman at the Well – first go get your husband (she got past it)

Nicodemus – You must be born again

Syro-phonician woman – I can't leave the disciples to feed the dogs

Jesus always places a *skandalon* in their way to see if they have the faith that's required to get past it.

Scripture tells us of a massive *skandalon* that is coming upon the whole world in the future. It's called the Great Tribulation, and it will turn a lot of people away. Matt 24:9-10 **"Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be**

**hated by all nations
because of me. 10 At that
time many will be
skandalizoed
(skandalisqh,sontai) from the
faith**

16

“Are we supposed to do that?
Should we be putting up
roadblocks and barriers and
difficulties in people’s way to
make it difficult for them to
accept Jesus? Is that our
role, to test their faith to see if
it’s adequate?”

Absolutely!

“What barrier should we put
up? Should we tell people to
sell all they have and give to
the poor?”

No, that’s only appropriate for
people like the rich young
ruler who have a problem with
greed.

“Should we tell them to first go
get their husband?”

No, that was appropriate for
the woman at the well
because of her
circumstances.

“Should we call them all
hypocrites or dogs?”
No.

We don’t have to use any of
those *skandalons*, because
we have one that will work

much better. God has given
us the ultimate *skandalon*.

**1 Cor.1:23 we preach Christ
crucified: a *skandalon* to
Jews and foolishness to
Gentiles, 24 but to those
whom God has called, both
Jews and Greeks, Christ the
power of God and the
wisdom of God.**

The ultimate *skandalon* is the
Gospel itself. It is the perfect
roadblock in front of heaven,
because it repels all
unbelievers and admits all
believers.

TT 1 Pe.2

To the lost it is an impossible
blockade, but to those with
faith it is a precious stone that
exposes their true faith.

18

**1 Pet 2:7 Now to you who
believe, *this stone is
precious*(!) – that big rock in
the middle of the road that’s
blocking your path and stalling
you out in life and making it so
hard to believe...is *precious*
But to those who do not
believe, "The stone the
builders rejected has
become the capstone," 8
and, "A stone that causes
men to stumble and a
skandalon that makes them
be *skandalizoed*."**

To them it’s a terrible
blockade, but for us that
rock is precious. It’s
wonderful.

Paul puts it this way:
2 Cor.2:15 **For we are to
God the aroma of Christ
among those who are
being saved and those
who are perishing. 16
To the one we are the
smell of death; to the
other, the fragrance of
life.**

That same rock in the
road is a sweet fragrance
to those who believe, and
a putrid stench to those
who are lost.

The Gospel is designed
to offend those who will
not believe.

We **MUST** be willing to
offend people with the
Gospel.

TT Gal.5

There are a lot of people
in the church today who
seem to think that this
wonderful *skandalon*
property of the Gospel is
actually a defect that
needs fixing. And so they
soften up the offensive,
sharp corners on the
Gospel to make it safer
and more palatable to the
one who has inadequate
faith.

Removing the *skandalon* from the Gospel is a very serious sin.

The false teachers in Galatia who were teaching salvation through circumcision were trying to convince the people that Paul was on their side. "Paul would agree with us – he is preaching circumcision now."

Paul writes back and says, "NO! I don't teach that!"

Then he uses this argument: Gal 5:11 **Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the *skandalon* of the cross has been abolished.**

Paul says that whole argument can't be true, because if it were, the Gospel would no longer be offensive. And that's the end of his argument, because that proves his point.

21

If it's not offensive, it's not the Gospel. If it brings unity into the world and not division and strife, then it's not the Gospel. If it attracts most people and repels hardly anyone, it's not the Gospel.

If your church is a comfortable place for those who do not have genuine, total faith in

Christ, that's proof you have a false Gospel.

And amazingly we have people today writing books by the truckload about how to present the Gospel in a non-threatening, non-offensive, non-skandalous way.

Churches advertise in the paper, "Come to our church and you will be comfortable. No one is going to bring up your sin or make you feel uneasy in any way..."

The world is knocking down the doors of churches like that excited to get in, because finally they can get some heaven insurance and alleviate their guilt without having to give up their sin and surrender their lives to Christ.

How many of you have been to a Christian concert lately? How often do you go to one of those, and supposedly the Gospel was presented, supposedly that's the whole point of the concert, and yet no one in the crowd is offended.

That's not the Gospel

22

I'm not saying we want to purposely be obnoxious all the time and offend people for the sake of offending them.

We should never offend needlessly by putting up unnecessary barriers.

That goes on today as well.

There are Christian leaders who won't offend the world with the Gospel, but they don't mind offending them with their political opinions.

I have a lot of political opinions. I have strong views on economics and taxation. And this pulpit would be an effective forum for me to propagate my views.

But would that be a wise thing to do? If I give my views on estate taxes or a national sales tax or discourse on supply side economics, some people would like that and others would be offended – would that be wise?

Is it worth offending the world over issues like that?

23

That very question came up in a very intriguing event in Mt.17.

Some people had asked Peter if Jesus paid the temple tax.

Matt 17:25-27 **"Yes, he does," he replied.**

Peter must have got to wondering about that, because it really is ridiculous, if you think about it, that the Lord should have to pay a tax for His own Temple. That's like charging the King a palace tax.

When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. "What do you think, Simon?" he asked. "From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes-- from their own sons or from others?" 26 "From others," Peter answered. "Then the sons are exempt," Jesus said to him.

If that's what Peter was thinking, then his instincts were right on. But there is another question at hand.

It's silly for Jesus and His disciples to have to pay a Temple tax. But the greater question is this: if they don't pay it, that would offend the Jews, and would that be worth it?

Jesus gives the answer in v.27.

27 "But so that we may not *skandalizo* them, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch;

open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours."

It's not worth offending them over issues like taxation.

25

I avoid preaching my opinions about politics or about anything else, because I don't want anyone to come in here and be repelled from the Kingdom of Heaven because they are offended at my opinions.

That would be needlessly repelling them. I only want to offend with the Gospel.

But outside of the Gospel, there is never any barrier that we should put in front of anyone.

Ro.14:13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put *any* stumbling block or *skandalon* in your brother's way.

(Also Ro.16:17, 1 Co.8:13)

Turn back to Lk.7

26

All that helps us understand what Jesus is saying in Lk.7

The climax of this passage is when Jesus says, "Blessed is the man who is not repelled by the barriers I put up. Blessed

is the man's whose faith doesn't crumble when God does things he doesn't understand."

Now let's take a look at why Jesus made that remark.

John gets word of what Jesus is doing, and Lk.7:18 **John's disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them, 19 he sent them to the Lord to ask a question**

John is in prison, and he says to two of his followers, "You two guys come here close to the bars. I have a question I want you to take to Jesus."

This is a period of rising disappointment in Jesus. He is not turning out to be the type of Messiah the people had hoped for, and enthusiasm was waning.

They were beginning to become disillusioned, and many were wondering if Jesus was really the one or not.

Imagine Jesus, maybe standing talking with a large crowd, and all of the sudden the disciples of J the B arrive.

Jesus and John the Baptist were very different but both were very striking individuals. There were the most dramatic figures in Israel at the time.

All the people came to see John. Everyone knew he was a prophet from God (first in 400 y)

And he turned out to be not only a prophet but greater than any other prophet as the forerunner of the Messiah – the Elijah who was to come! And he was himself a fulfillment of prophecy – one of the most anticipated promises of the OT.

And of course Jesus was also very famous at this point, and many were hailing Him as the Messiah. News of His miracles had gone everywhere.

So you have the two most significant figures in the nation – in fact, the two most important men who had ever lived, about to engage in a dialogue.

28

A message from the greatest prophet ever to the Messiah himself! An important communication between the two most important men who had ever walked the face of the earth. What would it be?

What is the best man going to say to the Bridegroom?

Can you imagine if you had been standing there and heard the message? Those who did hear it must have gasped. When they heard that John said *this...*

"Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

What? *Doubt?* John, the most powerful, headstrong preacher they had ever heard? John, who constantly pointed people to Christ?

This prophet who devoted his entire life to pointing to Jesus and saying, "He's the one. Follow Him. I'm not worthy to untie His sandals. He is greater. He must increase and I must decrease..."

John the Baptist, who at Jesus' baptism got to witness the entire Trinity all at once (God the Son stood before him, God the Holy Spirit descended as a dove, and God the Father spoke audibly from heaven confirming Jesus to be His Son).

And now he's doubting?

Apparently, John had run into a boulder in the road. It was a big boulder, and he was having difficulty getting around it.

He had encountered a *skandalon*.

He was going along great guns for a long time, headed for the top of the mountain, but now he hits an obstacle that threatens to repel him, and as a result he is doubting if Jesus is even the Messiah!

What was the *skandalon*? What could have made John doubt?

30

Scripture doesn't say explicitly, but there are some things we can observe.

1. Unfulfilled expectations
Jesus was not shaping up to be the kind of Messiah John had expected.

John was a prophet of God. God came to him and told him to devote his life to preaching this message: Messiah is about to arrive, and when He arrives he will bring final judgment.

Devote your life to saying "Repent, because judgement day is coming!" and when the Messiah arrives, I want you to point to Him and say, "He's the

one who is to bring that judgment.”

And John did it.

We are introduced to John’s ministry in Mtt.3. John was fearless.

31

Mt.3:7-12 **But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them** (Hello gentlemen, How are you doing today? No.)

You might think John would want to curry some kind of favor with these powerful men so he can get his movement going – especially since they went out of their way to come all the way out to him in the desert.

But look how he greets them:

"You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ...

He greets them by calling them snakes.

The picture is of a bunch of snakes slithering along as fast as they can across the desert trying to stay ahead of the flames of a wildfire.

“Who tipped you off that the fire of hell is right on your tail? Who warned you to come

running out here you bunch of snakes?”

32

10 The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

“You guys are trees, and God has an axe, and at any moment He is going to take His backswing, and in one mighty blow you will be felled, and you will be thrown into the fire.”

“The axe is right there at the root – judgment is just about to come.”

11 "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. (If you are a believer He will baptize you with the Spirit, but if you are an unbeliever *He will baptize you with fire.*)

12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

That’s John’s message: Messiah is going to arrive, and

He’s going to arrive with a winnowing fork.

He will divide out the righteous and the unrighteous, and He is going to pour out the wrath of God on the unrighteous.”

That’s John’s expectation.

33

Messiah’s ministry will be that of rewarding faithful people like John, and evil monsters like Herod will be punished.

Then comes Jesus. And everywhere He went He showed mercy, forgiveness and grace.

And when the sons of thunder wanted to call down fire He rebuked them, and said “no, don’t do that.”

And to Nicodemus He said, **God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.** (Jn.3:17)

J the B had revelation direct from heaven that the Messiah would come and judge.

So he goes out in the spirit and power of Elijah and thunders against

Herod. But no fire comes down from heaven. There is not one single act of judgment from Christ.

Herod goes on eating and drinking, John gets thrown in prison where he sits month after month until finally he is executed.

Meanwhile Jesus is on a mission of mercy and saying He didn't come to judge.

34

John devoted his entire existence to the one task God had given him, he prepared the way, Jesus came, John pointed everyone to Jesus, they followed Jesus – everything according to plan except...

no judgment.

John watches Jesus go around healing the masses and there is no sign of a winnowing fork anywhere.

John said the axe is at the root of the tree, but Jesus seems to be walking around the tree sprinkling fertilizer. Where is the axe? That didn't seem to square with God's own Words.

John is perplexed, and He comes to Jesus with his difficulty. *There is nothing whatsoever wrong with that.* Jesus doesn't rebuke him. In

fact, Jesus spends the rest of the chapter praising John the Baptist.

It's OK to be honest about doubts.

There is no point in trying to hide the fact that you have a difficulty in your mind that perplexes you. Be honest with God and come to Him with it.

You don't have to be ashamed about an honest doubt.

This isn't anything different from what the other great prophets did.

1 Pet 1:10-11 Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

36

They knew He would come and suffer. And they also knew He would come in glory. And those two things didn't seem to make any sense (they didn't realize He would come two times).

So they were perplexed. It's the same way for John.

John's question is very natural – "I still believe the judgement is coming. Did I misunderstand? Is it You or someone else? (perhaps someone else will come along and do that part – not far from the truth)

Remember John was an OT prophet, and so he couldn't have known the mystery of the Church (Messiah would come 2 times, 1st time to suffer and 2nd time in judgement, with the Church Age in between)

There is another reason John had to doubt.
2. Difficult circumstances. J the B was in a prison. He had had an incredibly successful ministry but it ended in disaster.

38

He was a powerful, dynamic preacher. He was given the most important task of any human being up to his time: announcing the Messiah.

He did an excellent job. He was fearless. He said exactly what needed to be

said to whom it needed to be said.

The Pharisees came and he called them snakes running from judgment. King Herod was immoral and John rebuked him.

You would think a figure like that would be rewarded in the kingdom of God. Instead he is thrown in a prison.

Not just any prison. 5 mi. east of northern tip of dead sea and 15 miles south an old Herodian palace that had been converted to a fortress (Macaris). In the bottom of it a pit - dark, damp, stifling hot dungeon.

John had given up every pleasure of life. He lived in the desert, ate locust and wild honey, even wore uncomfortable clothes – his whole life.

And now, in his 30s, John had been in prison for over a year and was facing execution. John did what was right, rebuked Herod, and the day he did that was the last day he ever saw daylight.

Barclay: For any man that would have been a terrible fate, but for John the Baptist it was worse than for most. He was a child of the desert; all his life he had lived in the

wide open spaces, with the clean wind on his face and the spacious vault of the sky for his roof. And now he was confined within the four narrow walls of an underground dungeon. For a man like John, who had perhaps never lived in a house, this must have been agony. In Carlisle Castle there is a little cell. Once long ago they put a border chieftain in that cell and left him for years. In that cell there is one little window, which is placed too high for a man to look out of when he is standing on the floor. On the ledge of the window there are two depressions worn away in the stone. They are the marks of the hands of that border chieftain, the places where, day after day, he lifted himself up by his hands to look out on the green dales across which he would never ride again. John must have been like that; and there is nothing to wonder at, and still less to criticize, in the fact that questions began to form themselves in John's mind.

So John had two massive boulders blocking the road. And so he comes to Jesus admitting doubt.

How did Jesus respond? What would the King of kings say to his own forerunner expresses doubt publicly?

41

Jesus doesn't rebuke John. Instead He responded by providing proof in v.21.

Most of the time if you look at a list of Jesus' miracles, Lk.7:21 isn't even on the list, and yet this single verse displays the most dazzling display of mighty miraculous deeds clustered together in a single verse anywhere in the whole Bible.

21 At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind.
22 So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.

42

Jesus pointed to his deeds. They prove he is who He said He was. They are not like the miracles any other prophet had ever done (they were greater and he did them with his own

power). They *prove* He was God.

I just fall over when someone says, “You can’t really prove Christianity.”

You can prove Christianity, and Jesus did it with His miracles.

And His deeds are unmistakable. Often His words are cryptic and veiled and difficult to understand, but no one could argue with His deeds.

Jn.10:25 The works I do in my Father’s name speak for me

Jesus is the only One ever to fulfil all the qualifications of Messiah. (All these miracles He does in v.21 are things the OT prophesied that the Messiah would do)

Isa.35:5-6
the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. 6 Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.

The blind receive sight,...the deaf hear,
Isa 29:18 In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see.

the lame walk,
Isa 34:8 For the LORD has a day of vengeance, a year of retribution, to uphold Zion's cause. 9 Edom's streams will be turned into pitch...

35:5 Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. 6 Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.

those who have leprosy are cured,
Ezek 36:25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities...26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you;...29 I will save you from all your uncleanness.

the dead are raised,
Isa 26:19 But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead.

43

It is all summed up by the statement in Isa.61:1 **and the good news is preached to the poor.**

Did Jesus do all that? Yes – He did it right there on the spot while they were watching.

They came with their question, and Jesus said, “Before I answer, watch this...”

And there were many there who had diseases (with painful external symptoms – boils, etc.) many who were sick (perhaps carried there on a stretcher) many who had demons (some were no doubt violent, shouting, maniacal) and many who were blind (people who could only beg for a living and who had no hope of recovery)

And Jesus says, “Hold on just a second, I want you to see something.” And He instantly healed every one of them completely.

“That’s your answer. Go tell John what you just saw. I’m doing exactly what the OT says the Messiah is supposed to do.”

When Jesus encounters unbelief He rebukes it, but He accommodates honest doubt. Jesus is so gentle with people who have a sincere heart.

This is such an encouragement for us

today. We run into roadblocks too.

45

Anyone who studies Scripture and takes it seriously will come across perplexities.

For John, he couldn't understand why God was so lenient.

For other people, sometimes they have a tough time understanding why God isn't more lenient – He seems to them to be too strict.

Whatever perplexity is in your mind, if it's an honest question, it's OK.

People wonder, "If there is a God, why does he allow children to suffer and die? Why does He allow evil at all?"

Why doesn't he get rid of all the false religions?
How could a loving God send people to hell?

I hope you never feel embarrassed or intimidated to ask questions like that here. No one is under the illusion that you have everything figured out. All of us have questions, and this is the place to ask them.

Sometimes God doesn't measure up to what we expect. The question is, how do you respond when

something happens that seems to contradict God's Word?

How do you respond to an obstacle like that?

46

And what about negative circumstances?

What is your reaction to pain?

It's natural to wonder, "Why is God letting this happen? Isn't He all-powerful? Isn't He perfectly loving?"

Doubt comes from our inability to understand painful circumstances. (Barriers)

Some beat themselves up and say, "I'm evil for even having such thoughts. I guess I just have an unbelieving heart"

How can you tell if you have sincere doubt or hardened unbelief? It is shown by the way you approach the obstacle.

Examine your heart. Are you looking for reasons to believe or reasons not to believe?

Are you quick to turn away, or are you eager to get past the *skandalon*?

Doubt: Wants to believe, but needs more information. It just wants to be sure.

Sinful Unbelief: Refuses to believe. Claims he wants proof, but when it is provided ignores it.

Unbelief finds a difficulty in the Bible and deep down says, "Good. This proves it isn't true."
Doubt finds a difficulty in the Bible and deep within him is troubled and says, "Oh, I hope there is a solution to this!"

Jesus sent an answer to John, but not the answer John wanted.

Jesus doesn't move either obstacle does He? Both boulders are still sitting right there in the middle of John's road.

Jesus gives no explanation about why there is no judgment yet.

He gives no hint about why John is in prison instead of serving at Jesus' right hand in a palace.

He gives no comment about why Herod is still happily going on with his evil with impunity.

He doesn't explain the church age, the 1st and 2nd coming, etc.

48

What He does do, however, is provide adequate proof that He is worthy of trust.

Faith is not fortified by the removal of obstacles. God does not build your faith by providing easy answers to all your questions.

Each one of those OT passages that Jesus alludes to in His answer is in the context of judgment.

Jesus was saying, “John, the plan regarding judgment is going ahead exactly according to schedule just as it was planned and announced in the OT and by you. Don’t worry about that. Even though you don’t see it now, just trust Me.”

It is OK to come to God with your doubts, but don’t expect Him to answer all your questions.

He won’t do that. But what He will do, if your heart is sincere, is provide adequate evidence and proof that He can be trusted. And then you just need to trust it.

49

God is not a giant, celestial providing answers to all our little curiosities. Many things are left hidden.

But He always provides more than adequate proof that He and His Word can be trusted.

When you hit a roadblock – go to the Lord with it. He won’t remove it, but He will show you the way past it.

Jesus gives a mild, gentle warning to John. So – gentle – in the form of a beatitude. Blessed is the man who is not repelled by the barriers I put up, John.

Blessed is the one who, after he decides to follow, doesn’t choke when it’s not what he expected.

You have got it made if you are not repelled by those barriers, because it means your faith is real.

50

What about you? Are you repelled by barriers or do you accept them? Do trials drive you toward God or away from Him?

When you have doubts, do you use them as an excuse to sin, or do you use them as an impetus to seek God?

What kind of barriers are there in your life right now? Is there a rock that is in your way?

- a perplexing question
- a physical ailment
- maybe you suffered a great loss

- maybe it’s just laziness, lack of discipline that’s in your way
- person at work
- person you are married to (maybe it’s the fact that you’re not married to any person).
- your job
- or maybe just doubts that came out of nowhere

To the world those obstacles are lethal. They see the promise of heaven, but are repelled by the rock in the way.

But Peter says for us that Rock is *precious*. We actually love the *scandalon* – the barrier – the obstacle, because it shows us the genuineness of our faith.

51

I want to tell you about a man whose faith carried him beyond a boulder in the road.

Horatio Spafford was no stranger to horrible pain. He knew the agonizing despair and horror of losing his only son.

He also lost a great deal of his worldly possessions in the great Chicago fire of 1871.

After about two years of helping the thousands who were left homeless by the fire, he decided to take a vacation. They were to go to England to join Moody and Ira Sankey on one of their evangelistic crusades, then travel in Europe.

Horatio Spafford was delayed by some business, but sent his family on ahead. He would catch up to them on the other side of the Atlantic.

Their ship, the Ville de Havre, never made it. Off Newfoundland, it collided with an English sailing ship.

Anyone who knows this story has probably imagined what it was like for those 4 little Spafford girls and their mother on that ship...

(play CD)

It's impossible to fathom the agony Spafford must have felt when he thought about the terror that filled the last moments of his 4 little girls' lives as they went down with the ship and drown in the freezing cold water.

Now all his children were dead.

He then boarded a ship and headed off to cross the ocean to meet his grieving wife.

They say when he was passing over the place where the ship went down, he looked out to the water and penned the hymn "It is Well."

When peace like a river
attendeth my way
When sorrows like sea-billows
roll (Imagine the waves of
grief rolling over him and
enveloping him like a billowing
cloud of fog at sea)

Whatever my lot, Thou hast
taught me to know: / It is well,
it is well with my soul.

Tho' Satan should buffet, tho'
trials should come, / Let this
blest assurance control, / That
Christ hath regarded my
helpless estate, / And hath
shed his own blood for my
soul.

My sin--oh the bliss of this
glorious thought! / My sin--not
in part but the whole, / Is
nailed to the cross and I bear
it no more; / Praise the Lord,
praise the Lord, oh my soul.

And, Lord, haste the day when
my faith shall be sight, / The
clouds be rolled back as a
scroll, / The trump shall
resound, and the Lord shall
descend-- / "**Even so**"--it is
well with my soul.

(sing)

• Cards & brochures

- Pick up a visitor's pack
- Theology class from 5:00-5:45 (10 weeks)
- **Setup signup**
- next Sunday is the fellowship meal
- **5th Grade group Friday the 31st at our house from 6:30-8:30**
- **Thursday Bible study CANCELLED**
- Tuesday Bible study cancelled (re-start July 9)
- Ladies' Bible study is meeting this week
- **Call people forward to pray**

BENEDICTION

Heb.6:18-20 **God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. 19 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, 20 where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf.**