

Don't be Stumbled by God's Providence

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Bible Text: Luke 7:18-23
Preached on: Sunday, March 7, 2010

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Let's take our Bibles and turn to the gospel of Luke, Luke 7. We're breaking away from my usual studies in Mark's gospel. The reason for that is I am due to speak at a small Bible convention next month and this week I've been preparing my messages, so what I'm doing is going back to a passage that I preached on before. So I hope you'll bear with me in that. It's not exactly the same message I've preached before, I've done some fresh work on it, and hopefully this will be profitable for us this evening.

Let's read together Luke 7:19.

19 And John calling unto him two of his disciples sent them to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another? 20 When the men were come unto him, they said, John Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another? 21 And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight. 22 Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached. 23 And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

May the Lord bless that reading of his holy word.

Let us begin by turning to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, we thank you and praise you that we have in our hands the inspired word of God. We thank you that this is a God-breathed word and that though we may have come to this passage before and even heard messages on this before, Lord, this is a living word and so we pray that the entrance of your word would bring light this evening, that you would open our eyes to behold wondrous things from your law, and that you would help us to see things both new and old. Please help us, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

I want to begin by asking you a question this evening: are you a person who is easily offended? Are you a person who becomes upset and agitated if someone should snub you

in some way or make an uncomplimentary remark about you? Do you go off in a huff and allow a cloud of doom to descend upon you if somebody doesn't always appreciate what you've done, or they slight you in some way? Are you a person who becomes prickly and irritable if such a thing as that should happen? Well, I'm sure if we are Christians here this evening, we have learned that the Bible teaches us not to be those who quickly and easily take offense. We try, don't we, as we go on in the Christian life to develop something of a thicker skin so that by God's grace we are able in many instances just to overlook and forgive and forget many offenses that are caused by those around us.

So then let me ask you a different question: are you offended by God? Are you offended by the way that Jesus deals with you in this life? Do you find his ways sometimes perplexing and mystifying almost to the point where you are offended? Well, this evening I want us to consider the situation of John the Baptist, a great and eminent servant of the Lord, a man who's known considerable usefulness in the kingdom of God and, yeah, a man who suddenly finds things running counter to his own expectation to such an extent that he even begins to question whether Jesus is actually the promised Messiah, "Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?" Are you really the one? These things that are happening are causing me to doubt. These things that are happening to me are causing me to doubt. Are you really the promised Messiah or should we look for another?

This is the question that I want us to think about this evening and we're going to look at it under three headings. We're going to consider the reason for John's question, the answer to John's question, and then the appended warning, and we'll make a couple of applications at the end.

Firstly, then, let's consider the reason for John's question. John the Baptist was a man with a unique role in the redemptive scheme. His ministry was prophesied by Isaiah. He would be that voice in the wilderness crying, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God." Filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb, he would be raised up by God to turn many of the people back to the Lord. His boldness and his courage was like that of prophets of old, particularly that of Elijah. He spoke plainly against sin and hypocrisy. He rebuked those who came to Christ out of impure and evil motives, "Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? The ax is laid at the root of the tree and every tree which bringeth forth not good fruit will be hewn down and cast into the fire."

So John was a very bold and faithful prophet, however as is often the way with bold and faithful prophets, ungodly and unbelieving men will do their utmost to have them silenced and that's how it was for John the Baptist, having spoken out against the sinfulness of Herod in taking for himself his brother's wife, John the Baptist finds himself arrested and thrown into prison and his ministry appears to have been brought to a premature end. In fact, nothing more is heard of John the Baptist in Luke's gospel until Luke 7:18 when Luke having reported on the teachings, the healings and the raising of a dead boy to life, he informs us in verse 18 that the disciples of God went to him and showed him all of these things. "John," they said, "have you heard what this man is doing? Have you heard how he's raising the dead? How he's healing the sick? How he's

teaching and preaching with authority and with power?" John's disciples, they go and they report to him of all the things that Jesus was continuing to do.

So John, then, is receiving these fragments, he's beginning to piece together these little pieces of news and he's fitting together a mental identikit picture in his mind to see if the information that he's receiving matches up to the prophesies of holy scripture. "Are these the kind of works and deeds that we are to expect from the promised Messiah? Does what I'm hearing confirm for me that Jesus is indeed the Savior sent from heaven?" John is allowing himself to think about the most important question in life: what do I think about the person of Jesus Christ? What is my relationship to the person of Jesus Christ? Do I believe that he really is the promised Messiah? This is the most important question in life and if you're not a Christian here this evening, this is a vitally important question for you to think about. Do you ever allow yourself a moment to think about that question? In amongst all of the questions that may be buzzing around in your mind at this present time, do you ever allow yourself to focus upon that one? Who is this person, Jesus Christ? What is my relationship to Jesus Christ?

You know, we live in a world where we are continually bombarded by all kinds of information, we have radios and iPods and tvs and dvds and all of these kind of things, and the effect of all of this is that you are never given a moment to ponder and to think seriously about the deep, the most important questions of life, your soul, eternity, your relationship to Jesus Christ. John here is allowing himself to think about this question, the most important question you can ask yourself, that biblical question: what think ye of Christ? Vitally important. Your eternal destiny hangs upon that question.

Now I said that our first point is the reason for John's question. Let's just think about that. What was the reason for this question? I mean, John the Baptist, he was the appointed messenger and herald, wasn't he? He was the one who would be the forerunner who would go on and say, "Make straight paths in the desert. Make a highway for our God." Indeed wasn't he the one who said prior to Christ's baptism, "Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world!" Surely, if anybody knew that this was the promised Messiah, it was John the Baptist.

So why, then, does he ask this question, "Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?" What's the reason for that? Well, a number of explanations have been given. Some say that it was due to John's imprisonment, that here is John, a man used to the wide, rugged, open spaces, the open vitality of wilderness life suddenly finds himself restricted and subject to the claustrophobic conditions of a dark, dank, gloomy prison cell and it's the restrictions that have been imposed upon him by this trial which had brought on a deep sense of melancholy and depression almost leading to a complete loss of faith. Others have said that it was because his work had been halted, that here is the man who is the promised forerunner, the herald, perhaps he was envisioning thoughts of a long and fruitful ministry pointing men and women to Jesus Christ, and yet now he finds himself shut up in a gloomy prison cell far removed from all of the excitement and the attention that was building up around the ministry of Jesus Christ, and as a result he's become frustrated and disillusioned and he's confused. These are some of the explanations that

have been put forth. What do we make of these? Is there any substance to these arguments?

Well, certainly those kind of emotions wouldn't have been far from the surface of John's mind. Any person, no matter how strong their convictions, is going to find their faith severely tested by a period of imprisonment. You think about Thomas Cranmer, one of the great English Reformers, like Ridley and Latimer, so greatly used of God for the spread of the Reformation across England, but when Mary Tudor came to the throne, then the likes of Cranmer and Ridley and Latimer were thrown into prison. In fact, Cranmer was kept in prison until he would recant of his Protestant faith, and so feeble did he become in his health and so dejected in his spirit that eventually he did recant of his Protestant faith. Now as you probably know, he eventually recanted of his recantation and he was sent to the flames, and when he went to the fire, he thrust his hand into the flames, "O thou hand that wrote so contrary to my heart, thou must suffer first!" And he died a glorious martyr's death.

But I tell you that just as an illustration of how a period of imprisonment can have a very injurious effect upon the faith of a believer, and so we can say certainly those kind of emotions would have been in John's mind. But there is more to this. Remember who John is. He's a man who's steeped in the Old Testament scriptures, intimately acquainted with the writings of the men like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Malachi and Micah. He studied these books in great detail, in great depth, and now he finds himself in this predicament and he wants to know for sure if all the things that he's read are really true. Is Jesus a fulfillment of all that he's read in those messianic prophesies. He wants certainty. He wants assurance.

Again you may say, "Well, why should there be any doubt in his mind? Why should he question this?" Because as John is sitting there in his prison cell and he's piecing together all of these pieces of breaking news and the field reports that he's getting, he's finding that on the one hand, yes, many of the pieces are falling into place. Jesus in his works of mercy and compassion, his healing of the sick, restoring sight to the blind, driving out evil spirits, he is doing all of those things that were expected of the Messiah, works of mercy, works of grace, works of compassion. However, there were other parts to the picture that seem to be missing. Boys and girls, have you ever been doing a jigsaw and as you're putting that jigsaw together, you notice that one half of it begins to fill out quite nicely but then the other half is almost completely blank and you begin to wonder if some of the pieces might actually be missing? Well, in a way, this is John's predicament. He's fitted together one half of the jigsaw, if you like, the grace, the mercy, the compassion, all of those pieces are there, but there seem to be other pieces missing, vital pieces, the pieces that he had warned the people to look for. The judgment, the wrath, the vengeance, the ax to be laid at the root of the tree, the winnowing fan, the purging of the threshingfloor, where were all of these things? That's what was expected, that's what was advertised, if you like. Just to go back to the illustration of the jigsaw, if you find that there seem to be pieces missing, you go back to the box, don't you, and you look at the picture to see what it should look like, and this is what John is doing in this situation. He's going back to that picture of the Messiah that he has in his mind drawn from the

scriptures and he's comparing it with the things that he's hearing, and it seems to him as if there are pieces missing.

He's troubled. He's perplexed and so he says, "Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?" In the original, the phrase is, "Are you the coming one?" It's a reference to Luke 3:16, John's own words where he says, "I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh." Also the words of Psalm 118, "Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD." So John is asking, "Is it really you? Are you the promised one? Are you the long-expected Messiah or look we for another?" That's allos, "Should we look for someone somewhat different to you?" Jesus has come with works of grace and mercy and compassion but where is the wrath? Where is the vengeance? Where is the judgment?

This is John's honest question as he struggles with his understanding of the whole messianic program and it teaches us, doesn't it, just what a very faithful book the Bible is. Now there are many books that are written about great men which when it comes to the less memorable, the more regrettable moments of their lives, it tends to put something of a rosy gloss over it. There's a word for it, isn't it, we call it a hagiography, looking at everything in that person's life through rose-colored spectacles. Well, the Bible isn't a hagiography. The Bible doesn't put a rosy glow on things. It doesn't hide from us the difficulties, the perplexities, the wrestlings of even the greatest of saints. So it is with John. John is a great man, there can be no doubt about that. Jesus himself said that, didn't he? Verse 28 of chapter 7, "Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist." He was an eminent servant of God, greatly used of God, and yet even he had his weaknesses and deficiencies in his understanding. Jesus goes on to say, verse 28, "he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

So John was the last in the line of that Old Testament prophetic tradition. He was raised up by God to bring prophetic reproof to the people and to point them to the coming Messiah but, even so, his understanding was still not perfect. It was still dim and shadowy in comparison to those who would come later, those who would witness the life and death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, those who would see something of the vastness, the scope of the inestimable benefits that Christ would bring in for his people. John had a dim understanding of this but he didn't see it in all its fullness, his understanding was limited and the Bible shows us that. It shows us the weakness of John but also it shows us his great strength as well. The Bible shows us his greatness, and what was that? It's the fact that John doesn't wrestle with these questions on his own. He goes immediately to the place where he will find help. He goes immediately to the place where he knows he will get answers, the place where we should take all of our doubts and our worries and our perplexities. He takes them straight to Jesus. If you're having difficulties and troubles and perplexities trying to understand a certain dark providence in your life right now, you can talk to Christian friends, you can read Christian books, both of those things will be a great help to you, but the best thing of all is to take it straight back to Jesus.

I remember Dr. Beeke a couple of years ago telling us, well, now three years ago he'd been to England to give a series of lectures about how to handle affliction in a Christian

manner, and he was preparing to give one address and he hadn't finished writing his introduction and he was sitting in a park in London just thinking about his introduction and he was watching a man throw a stick for a dog. And the dog ran to fetch the stick and brought it straight back and sat and looked at his master, and as Dr. Beeke was watching that, he thought that's a very good illustration of how we should handle our afflictions. When God throws the stick of affliction into our lives, we should take that and bring it straight to him and sit and wait upon him to see what he would have us do, how we should understand it, how we should respond to that affliction. And that's what John is doing here. He has perplexities, he's in a difficult situation, he doesn't understand but he sends it straight back to Jesus. And that's what we should all do, isn't it? That's what we sang earlier this evening, "What a friend we have in Jesus, all our griefs and sins to bear." What a privilege to carry everything to him in prayer.

So that's the first thing we're going to consider, the reason for John's question. Let's now consider the answer that Jesus gives. John's disciples here, they leave the prison and they return once more to witness the ongoing mighty deeds of Christ. It says there, "in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight." So the scripture here is giving us in a word picture, an indirect answer to John's question. These two disciples, they go and they find Jesus in the midst of his messianic work. People are crowding around him, pressing in upon him, every type and condition of men with all kinds of illnesses, ailments, sicknesses. The disciples of John, they probably have to stand back as this great mass of humanity presses in upon the Lord Jesus. And yet as they watched him, they would have noticed that no matter who came to Jesus whether it was a child born blind or it was a woman with a plague or a man in the grip of an evil spirit, no matter who came to Jesus not one of them was turned away. There was no need for a second opinion, no need for a referral, no need for a second appointment, whoever came to Jesus, they went away completely, entirely, thoroughly healed. As we've said in our studies of Mark's gospel, Jesus was a one man field hospital with a 100% success rate. This must have been an astonishing sight to behold.

The disciples of John were probably, they began to wonder whether they even really needed to ask this question at all. Perhaps they had the question of the Jews in John 7:31 on their lips, "When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?" Do we really even need to ask him? It's obvious, isn't it? What further proof do we need? But out of faithfulness to the commission of their master, when the opportunity comes, they go to Christ and they bring before him their question, "Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?" To which Jesus then replies, "Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen," they're going to get a visual answer to their question. These things were obvious. Miracles of healing and exorcism, restoration of sight, tremendous works of divine power and mercy, "tell John what things ye have seen," you have a visual answer to your question. But also they're going to hear something as well. He's going to give them a verbal answer, "the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached."

So Jesus here is echoing for them the words of Isaiah prophesied so many centuries before. This is exactly the kind of language that John the Baptist is going to understand. John the Baptist is a man who is deeply acquainted with the writings of the Old Testament prophets, especially the prophesy of Isaiah. This is his mother tongue, if you like. You can imagine how this is going to resonate with him, to hear these words coming back to him, the prophesy of Isaiah. This is his own language. I don't know if you've ever been in that situation. I was in Tokyo a few years ago visiting a friend and got separated in Shibuya which is a very busy part right in the center of Tokyo and I was surrounded by all these foreign faces and a foreign language, it was a little bit disconcerting. But then I could hear this voice calling to me across the square in a beautiful crisp English brogue and it was immediately reassuring to hear my own language in that situation. That's what Jesus is doing here, he's using language that John himself is very familiar with. It's going to resonate with him. It will reassure him. But more than that, he's drawing from very significant passages as well. These are passages which give to us the characteristics, the person specification of the Messiah.

Now some of these words Jesus has already quoted in Luke 4 when he took up the scroll in the synagogue and he said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor." Now here he is, he's in the midst of his messianic work and he's quoting this passage again. Why is that? Because he's doing exactly those things which the Spirit of the Lord had anointed him to do, those works of mercy and works of compassion. These were the things that would characterize the Messiah. This is one of the things by which he would be known.

Now let's ask: is this an answer, then, to John's question? Well, it's an indirect answer. It's an implied yes. It's as if to say, "Yes, John, I am the one you are to expect. I am fulfilling the messianic program completely, exactly in accordance with scripture but it may be in a way that you, John, are not quite expecting." Notice Jesus here in echoing the words of Isaiah, he's focusing upon the grace and the tenderness of God rather than in vengeance and judgment.

Now the passages that he quotes from in Isaiah, they do have judgment statements attached to them but Jesus doesn't draw upon those. Isaiah 29, for example, after proclaiming "the eyes of the blind shall see, the meek shall increase their joy in the LORD and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel," Isaiah also says, "For the terrible one is brought to nought, and the scorner is consumed, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off." So there is judgment predicted, announced in those passages but Jesus doesn't draw upon that. His emphasis in his earthly ministry is going to be upon grace and mercy and compassion. That will be the focus of his earthly ministry. Now that's not to say there's going to be no judgment, no vengeance, no wrath, but it's going to come later. Acts 17, "[God] hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained." Who is that man? It's Jesus Christ. He's appointed to be both the judge of both the quick and the dead. So there is going to be judgment but it's going to come much later.

So there's much more grace in God's present purpose than really John has understood and so that, then, is the answer to John's question which leads Jesus to give an appended warning because he closes by saying to the disciples and to John, "blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me." Blessed is he who is not made to stumble by me. Jesus knew that his life would be a source of offense, a source of stumbling to many people. We read that at the beginning of the gospel of Luke, don't we? Simeon's prophecy that this child would be for the falling and for the rising of many. And of course, you see that throughout the gospels, initially people come to Jesus and their desire is to follow Jesus, to be his disciples until they find out more about the nature of his teachings. They find out what it means to be a true follower of the Messiah and then they begin to become offended and troubled and they say, "This is a hard saying. Who can receive it?" And they turn and they go their way. It doesn't fit in with their conception of what the Messiah should be and what his people should do. They are stumbled. They are troubled. They are offended.

So it is for John the Baptist. In light of his own understanding of what Messiah should be and what he should do, i.e. bring judgment, bring vengeance, bring fire, there is a very real likelihood that he, too, might be troubled, stumbled, offended by this much more gracious, tender aspect to Jesus' ministry. It might not square with his own conception of what the Messiah should be and what he should do. He might be disturbed. He might be unsettled. He might even be scandalized by the mercy of God. Rather like Jonah, do you remember that other Old Testament prophet who was also given a strong message of judgment and repentance and sent to Nineveh to proclaim that message? And the Ninevites, they heard that message, they did repent and God saw their repentance and he himself relented of the judgment that he was going to bring upon them. But do you remember Jonah's reaction? Jonah was deeply troubled. He was deeply disturbed. He was scandalized that God should be so merciful to such a people as this.

So here we have John the Baptist, he's the last in the line of the Old Testament prophets and there's a very real danger that he might fall into that same trap. Now that word "offended," actually it refers to a trap. The word in the original, the scholars tell us, it refers to what is like the little bait stick that you get on a mousetrap. I don't know if you're familiar with mousetraps. We had a bit of trouble with mice last year some time and I became quite familiar with the latest in mousetrap technology. You know, you can get these high-pitched sonar devices which emit a very high-pitched sound that's supposed to drive them crazy. And there are other things which actually catch them alive. So if you're a humane person, you can take it out into the woods and let them free and they usually come back the next day anyway. And yet your basic standard mousetrap, it's like a spring-loaded device and it has on it a bait stick which is very very sensitive. You know, the mouse is only going to come around and sniffing around that bit of cheese and down comes that trap. You know, it's absolutely fatal to touch that bait stick. And what Jesus is saying here is, "Yes, I am the Messiah. I am the one you are to expect. I am fulfilling the messianic program completely, exactly in accordance with scripture, but," he says, "beware. Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me. Make sure you're not stumbled, tripped, fatally tripped if I'm fulfilling the plan in a way that you do not expect."

So then let's now make a couple of applications. What does this have to say to us? Firstly, be careful that you are not offended by the Messiah. "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended by me." Jesus knew he would be a source of offense, a source of stumbling. To the Jews he was a rock of offense. He was a stumblingblock. To the Greeks, the idea that salvation could come by the death of a man upon a cross, that was utter foolishness to them. The preaching of Christ was an offense to such people. How is it with you? Are you offended by Jesus Christ? Does he not really fit in with your conception of what the Messiah should be? The fact that he wasn't born in a huge palace in Jerusalem, he was born in a manger in Bethlehem? That he grew up as the son of a carpenter, despised and rejected of men, does that not really fit in with your conception of what a savior should be? And that he accomplished salvation, how? By a tremendous display of military strength and might? No, by dying in weakness and in agony upon a Roman cross. Does that not really square with your conception of what the Messiah should be? Are you offended by the person of the Lord Jesus Christ? You say, "No, I will not have this man to reign over me."

Well, if that's the case this evening, I have to warn you that you also are in danger of being tripped, of fatally stumbling over the person of Jesus Christ and I have to warn you that there is a day coming when Jesus Christ is coming back and when he comes back, he won't be coming back as gentle Jesus, meek and mild, he won't be coming back with mercy, grace and compassion. No, when Jesus comes back, he will be coming back with wrath, with vengeance and with judgment. Isaiah himself tells us he will tread out the winepress alone. "I will trample them in my fury," he says. "I will stain all my raiments for the day of vengeance is in my heart and the year of my redeemed is come." Beware of that day, my unconverted friend. Beware of stumbling over the person of Jesus Christ. Humble yourself before him. Believe upon him this evening. Trust in him as your Savior. "Kiss the Son lest he be angry and you perish out of the way."

There is a warning to unbelievers here. There's a warning for us as Christians as well this evening. You too need to be careful that you're not stumbled over the person of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. And obviously you're not stumbled over who he is. That's what a Christian is, it is a person who believes that Jesus is the promised one. But you can be stumbled over his dealings with you in this life. Take care that you're not offended if the plan is being carried out in a way that you did not expect. That's what John was being warned about here, wasn't it? The plan was being fulfilled in a way that could have been a real cause of stumbling for him, and if that's the case for a man like John the Baptist, how much more for the likes of you and I? You know, things happen to us in our lives, don't they, disappointments and setbacks, maybe it's heartbreaking news from the doctor, unemployment, sudden bereavement, and all of a sudden our whole world is turned upside down, all of our bright hopes and dreams are smashed on the cold hard floor of life, and if we're not careful, we can begin to allow hard thoughts towards God to enter into our minds, and we can begin to say to ourselves, "I've been a believer all these years and I've tried to do so much for the Lord and I've worked hard in the church, and now look at the mess I'm in. Now look at the situation I find myself in. I'm stuck down in this dark, dank, gloomy dungeon. It doesn't look like I'm ever going to get out." And if we

don't take a firm grip of our spiritual senses, there's a very real danger that we can be stumbled by the outworking of the plan in a way that we hadn't expected.

So we need to take care, don't we? We need to seek grace to develop a humble submissive spirit. We need to seek grace that we may receive from the Lord whatever he is pleased to give us, to take from him that cup which he presses into our hand and be willing to drink the contents no matter how bitter they may be. We need to say with his servants of old, "It is the Lord. Let him do what seemeth right in his sight." So with Job, "The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord!" Say with the hymnwriters we sang earlier, "What 'ere God ordains is right."

Horatio Spafford, you know about him here. I wasn't that familiar with him until I came to the States but you know him well, the Chicago businessman. For those of you that don't know, he lost his real estate in the 1871 Chicago fire but his great consolation was that none of his family were hurt in that fire. Then a couple of years later, his family were planning to go across to Europe to support D. L. Moody in an evangelistic campaign. So what Horatio Spafford did was he put his wife and his four daughters on board the Ville du Havre, the sailing ship, and sent them on to Europe ahead while he finished some business dealings at home. Well, that ship struck another ship mid-Atlantic and it sank. Some weeks later he got a telegram from his wife, just two words, "Saved alone." Alone. All of his four daughters perished in the Atlantic. Imagine that. How do you cope with that? What do you say to something like that? Well, Spafford, he boarded a boat and set off for Europe to be with his wife and even as he was on board the boat, these words began forming in his mind,

"When peace like a river attendeth my way
When sorrows like sea billows roll
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say
It is well, it is well with my soul

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come
Let this blest assurance control
That Christ (yes, He has) has regarded my helpless estate
And has shed His own blood for 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!"

Astonishing faith. That man wasn't stumbled. He wasn't offended. He managed to keep his walk of faith in the midst of that deep, dark, blackest of all providences. Still he was enabled to walk by faith.

And this is what Jesus is calling John the Baptist to when he says to him, "Blessed is he who is not offended by me. Happy is he. Happy is he who no matter what his straits, no

matter what his predicament, still he can find his rest, his peace, his contentment in me." Jesus here is calling forth the faith of John the Baptist. He's saying to John through his disciples, "John, I know things haven't worked out quite the way you expected. I know the plan doesn't seem to be working out how you had planned. But don't lose heart, John. Don't be discouraged, John. You keep walking by faith, John. You keep looking to me, John." And that's the message for all of us, isn't it? In all of our trials, our perplexities, our dungeon time, experiences, we're like John, aren't we? We have limited scope, we have limited vision. We don't see things as we should and so at such times we need to keep looking to Christ and looking to the grace of Christ to give us the wisdom and the patience and the understanding that we need so that we in the midst of the darkest of providences still we can put our faith and our trust in Christ, and even that we can rejoice that still the gospel is going forth.

"The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, and to the poor the gospel is preached and blessed, happy is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me." May God bless that word to us this evening.

Let's close with prayer.

O gracious God and sovereign Lord, we thank you that you have a plan for this world and for our lives and that you are working your plans and your purposes out. So we pray, O Lord, that when your plans cross our plans and contradict our plans, O Lord, that we would be given grace to humble ourselves under your hand and to continue looking to Jesus and walking by faith in him. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.