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The Blessedness of the Unoffended

by T. Austin-Sparks

*Transcribed from a message given in May 1959. The spoken form has been retained verbatim.
Words which were not clear have been enclosed in [square] brackets.*

To read a very familiar portion of the Word, from the second chapter of the book of the Kings, the second book of the Kings, the second chapter:

"And it came to pass, when the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me as far as Bethel. And Elisha said,, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Bethel. And the sons of the prophets that were of Bethel came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace. And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho. And the sons of the prophets that were of Jericho came near to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today? And he answered, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace. And Elijah said unto him, Tarry ye here, tarry here I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on. Fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood over against them afar off: and they two stood by Jordan. And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground. And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so. And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, which parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And

Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces. He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan; and he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord the God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over. And when the sons of the prophets which were at Jericho over against him saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him."

Turn to the gospel by Matthew, chapter 11, 11 and verse 2:

"When John heard in the prison the works of the Christ, he sent by his disciples and said unto him, Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go your way and tell John the things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them. And blessed is he whosoever shall find none occasion of stumbling in me."

In the letter to the Hebrews, chapter 10, chapter 10 of the letter to the Hebrews at verse 35:

"Cast not away therefore your boldness, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, having done the will of God, ye may receive the promise."

To revert to the old version of Matthew 11:6: "Blessed is he who shall not be *offended* in me." The blessedness of the unoffended. You will know that the word there "offend" or "offended", so frequently used in different connections in the New Testament, just means "a stumbling block". Literally: "Blessed is he who will not find Me to be a stumbling block" or "who will not stumble at Me". It is changed into the word "boldness" in the Revised and we shall see why in a moment or two.

The first thing then to take note of is that the Word of God does take account of the possibility of our being offended with Him. It does not say anywhere that that possibility should never arise and will never arise. The Lord has no where said that we shall never have any occasion for being offended with Him. He *has* indicated that there will be *plenty* of opportunity for so stumbling at Him, falling over Him, coming down because of Him - if you like: crashing because of Him. There will be plenty of occasion or opportunity for so doing. He has never said that it will never be so. It is well for us to recognise that.

Temptation is never sin. We all are tempted in this as in many other ways. And as you know, temptation is only another word for trial, so it is translated in some places "trial". And there's nothing wrong with trials, with being tried, if you like: with being tempted. And there will always be plenty of opportunity for being tempted to be offended with the Lord.

The Lord sent no word of rebuke to poor John the Baptist in the prison when he was perilously near to being offended with the Lord because of his situation. The Lord was not hard on John because of his question. He might, had He been another, have said, "But John, did you not point Me out as the Lamb of God? Did you not proclaim Me as the One, the Messiah? Haven't you preached about Me to multitudes? Have you not made the *strongest* declarations and affirmations as to what you believed about Me? And here you're asking a fundamental question about Me. John, what's gone wrong with you?" No, nothing like that. The Lord knows our frame, that we are dust. And the Lord, I'm saying, takes account of this ever present possibility in our weakness, of being offended with Him. But he

does attach to this matter a particular blessedness if we don't crash over the Stumbling Block of His ways with us, "And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me".

There's the possibility, then as to the reasons for the possibility.

I read that old story of Elijah and Elisha for one purpose only: just to get at one thing which is so common in our experience. It's no new thought, it has often been mentioned here, but note it again. It's a strange story that, isn't it? The strange behaviour of Elijah. It *did* seem that Elijah was trying to put off Elisha, if you like: to *reject* him. Again and again he said, "You stay here, the Lord has sent me to so and so. You stay here." On the face of it, it looked as though he was being rejected, put aside, not wanted; just not wanted! And Elisha, had he been what some of us are and said, "Oh well, if you don't want me then, alright! I'll stay here. I'll not go any further. It's quite evident that you have no place for me any more, no room for me, I don't count... Alright, well, sorry, but..." You see that's [breach], that's being offended. Doesn't it often look like that with the Lord? So often the ways of the Lord with us *could* be interpreted in that manner: the Lord doesn't seem to want us, He no longer has any interest in us, indeed He is relegating us to the place of the rejected. It seems that He is prepared to go on without us. We are not wanted – that's what it amounts to - we are not wanted, the Lord doesn't want us! Have you ever interpreted His ways like that? That's a form of offendedness or *stumbling* at the Lord isn't it? A coming down by the strangeness of the Lord's *seeming* willingness to do without us, to go on without us, to set us aside.

Of course that's not all the story of Elijah and Elisha or Elisha and Elijah, we'll touch it again likely in a moment, but there's one way which we can be offended with the Lord: His *seeming* either loss or lack of interest in us and concern, real concern to have us. But, if we knew the truth about Elijah, he was far more concerned to have Elisha than he was to get rid of him, but he wanted him on certain terms, on the terms of a man who had demonstrated that nothing else mattered in life than fellowship with His Lord. From that, he was not going to be put off, even by the Lord Himself. If you'd like to translate the thing into relationship with the Lord, it would amount to this: "Lord, *You* may feel that You can do without me but I can't do without You and I'm not going to. You started this business and You've just got to go on with it till the end, I'm not *going* to let go." May it not be that that is something of very great importance to the Lord in relationship of a servant who is going to be useful to Him? He's proved that his Lord is after all his life; he can't be shaken off. Think about that.

You have John the Baptist, here he is in prison. How utter John has been for the Lord! How he has poured himself out in the interests of Christ! How devoted: "Behold the Lamb of God! Behold the Lamb of God! He it is of Whom I said, There cometh one after me, the latches of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose. He must increase, I must decrease." Here is devotion; devotion to his own abnegation, and now he's in prison. He is in prison, his ministry is cut off, his popularity is suspended, if not ended, and in prison. The Lord seems to be doing nothing about it. Nothing about it? I think there's something in this, that when the Lord sent reply to John, told him of all the wonderful things that He was doing, in healing all manner of sicknesses, even to the raising of the dead; did He anticipate that if He'd stopped there John would have said, "Yes, but why doesn't He do something for *me*? I'm the lone one... doing it for everybody, but not for me! A lot of people are getting His blessing and good, but *I* am left out!" How easy it is to be offended when we seem to be just the *one* person who is overlooked. And just at that point, because perhaps the Lord anticipated that that is how John might have reacted, said, "And blessed is he that is not offended in Me" - covered Himself and perhaps helped John over His difficult style: the seeming indifference of the Lord, and the *seeming* favoritism or precedent, or selectiveness of the Lord - that He's blessing here, there, and this one, and that - but He leaves me out; forgets me.

Or when you come to the letter to the Hebrews: "Cast not away your confidence which hath great recompense of reward". I might stay with that word "confidence" just for a moment, as you see it's translated in the Revised Version "boldness", because it's the same word as is used of Peter and John in Acts 4 when they stood before the rulers, charged with filling all Jerusalem with their doctrine and they knew, they knew very well what kind of a place Jerusalem was; what they had done in Jerusalem to the Lord Jesus - the spirit was there, for their destruction. But they stood before those self-same rulers and it says about the rulers, "When they beheld the boldness of Peter and John" that word "boldness" is the same word here as in the Authorized "confidence" and Revised "boldness". What was it? Their forthrightness! Their unreservedness! Their absence of uncertainty! Here they are, they're not wavering, they're not, as we say, speaking with their tongue in their cheek as to what will happen to them if they are not very careful of what they say; being politic, diplomatic, carefully choosing their words lest they cause offence, or being very careful because they're not so sure of their ground. The word here, "confidence" or "boldness" is this; none of that!

They've got both their feet solidly down. They are speaking with assurance and confidence, they are forthright, they are not reserving anything. And to the Hebrews the word is "Cast not away *your downright forthrightness, your certainty, your assurance, your confidence*; cast it not away, it hath great recompense of reward". Now you see that you have to read the whole of this letter to the Hebrews in the light of that phrase alone, that clause alone. The whole context of this letter is over against much that was gnawing at the confidence of these Christians. There was, as we recently pointed out, the persecution. The writer reminds them of their early days when, at their beginnings, they suffered so great a contradiction, they suffered greatly at the beginning for their faith. Then they were confident, bold, assured, but the sufferings had increased... persecution, the activities of the Judaizers to undermine their confidence and faith in the Lord Jesus, the long delayed return of the Lord which they had been taught to expect at any time... all eating at their confidence.

These are some of the reasons for being offended, and you can add what you like to them - probably find something in the Word of God which corresponds to anything that you like to add - there are plenty of grounds and reasons for being offended if you're going to be! But, the Divine recompense: "And blessed is he that shall not be made to stumble, or who shall not stumble, be offended, in Me." I ask you: was Elisha justified in the end in sticking to it? Forgive me, if that sounds vulgar, was he justified in sticking to it, shall we say, to the bitter end? No bitter end, of course!

Of course Elisha had somehow a shrewd idea of what was going to happen, "I know it" he said, "I know it, I know it, hold your peace!" but the point is that Elisha was not going to let go without getting something out of this for God; getting something out of this for God! He was the Lord's servant, he was Elijah's servant, he had got to carry on the testimony - great weight of responsibility was going to rest upon him - because of that, for that very reason, he was taken this testing way. *Could* he, could he be put off? Could he be put off? And Elisha teaches us a lesson, oh, that we might learn it and be of the same spirit: to hold on, "Cast not away your confidence which hath great recompense of reward!" Elisha found that to be true and came into it.

This letter to the Hebrews lifts into view something very great at the end of the times of testing, doesn't it? "Wherefore receiving a kingdom which *cannot* be shaken..." Receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken! And, what you and I perhaps crave for, as much as anything in these days, is something that is substantial and unshakeable and sure and certain - the Rock. We are shaken, we are thrown about, everything is like that - often to wonder where we are, "Receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken. Let us hold fast, let us hold fast the beginning of our confidence, firm unto the end. Cast not away your confidence."

Of course we ought never to speak of things in the letter to the Hebrews without seeing the full context, reminding ourselves of it: the almost infinite difficulty of humans as we are, living a heavenly life, and walking a heavenly way on this earth. It is so *utterly* contrary to our nature. There is *nothing* in us by nature that helps us to walk a heavenly way, to have everything on a heavenly basis. Nothing at all, everything is against that: to come down to earth, to have what we can see, what is tangible, what is present. Our whole soul life wants it *now* and wants it in our hands; wants it as we can see it! And oh, this Heavenly Way of the letter to the Hebrews... the *heavenly* way, partners in a Heavenly calling... it is unspeakably difficult to nature, it is contrary to nature, and we find all the way along, almost every day that this difficulty arises in some form or another.

But, with all that, we agree in our heart of hearts that the Heavenly is the real and it is the only object worth living for. We've got enough in our spiritual experience to know that the Heavenly is, after all, the only thing for which to live. "Cast not away your confidence which hath great recompense of reward... you have need of patience that having done the will of God you may receive the Promise."