

Matthew 7:21-29

It seems it's almost become a cliché to talk about how easily offended some people are. It's often a generational thing, for sure. "My generation wasn't offended by anything but young people these days are offended by everything!"

For the record, I don't think we should ever make a habit out of needlessly offending people. That being said, sometimes, being offended is good. Look at the preaching of the prophets, and Jesus, and John the Baptist. Did they offend people sometimes? Absolutely. But if the result of being offended is that a person is woken up to the truth, well, then it was for the best.

But I want us to think about a more important question than whether or not people are too easily offended these days: What offends God? What thoughts, what words, what actions does God find offensive? Over the course of the next couple months, we're going to look at that question.

And we start here today with complacency. "Nothing to worry about. All is well. I'm good."

Jesus doesn't see it that way. He warns us that not everyone who sounds godly really is godly. Not everyone who calls him Lord belongs to his Kingdom. Even some of those who prophesy in his name and do miracles in his name do not really belong to him. The Book of 1 Samuel tells us that on one occasion, King Saul, a man we know well for his disobedience, pride, and hateful anger, prophesied. God's Spirit can work even in people who do not really know him.

Complacency is looking the part, acting the part, without really being the part. The decisive issue is obedience. It's not do you know God's word, but do you obey God's word? It's not how well you know the Bible but how well you live the Bible.

Jesus tells us that hearing his word and obeying it is like building your house on the rock. It has a solid foundation. It will weather the storms of life.

And I would imagine Jesus knew what he was talking about. We say that Jesus was a carpenter, and the son of a carpenter. But the Greek word used there basically just meant "builder." Given the scarcity of trees in the land of Canaan, building was probably more stonemason work than carpentry work.

Jesus grew up in Nazareth. Nazareth was just a little village. I think most Bible scholars believe there were about 400 people living there at the time of Jesus. But

Nazareth was just a mile from Sepphoris. Sepphoris was much larger, maybe 5000 people, maybe closer to 10,000. It was the “big city” compared to Nazareth.

After the death of Herod the Great, the city of Sepphoris was involved in a revolt against Roman taxes, and the city was largely destroyed. When Herod the Great’s son, Herod Antipas, became the ruler of Galilee, one of the things he did was to order that the city be rebuilt. That was going on during Jesus’ childhood and early adulthood. It’s very likely that Joseph and Jesus both worked in Sepphoris. It’s very likely that Jesus built homes before he began his ministry. As such, he would know about the importance of a solid foundation.

Now, I’m no builder. The biggest structure I’ve ever built was an 8 x 10 shed, and I had a lot of help with that. But, I will say this: It hasn’t fallen over yet. And I find construction to be interesting, so I try to know a little about it.

Sharon and I like watching construction shows on HGTV and DIY Network, which I think goes by a different name now. One of our favorites is “Building off the Grid,” which chronicles construction projects people undertake “off the grid,” homes and cabins built in the mountains or the backcountry with no electricity. Sometimes people pull off building really neat stuff in cool places. And sometimes you wonder what the heck they were thinking...

Earlier this summer, I was watching an episode where this young couple was building a cabin somewhere near the coast of southern Georgia, so the ground was really sandy. For the foundation, they dug a bunch of trenches. They put some rebar down in the trenches. Then they filled the trenches with concrete. There were no forms, just concrete poured in a ditch. It was hard to tell watching on TV, but it looked like the trenches were only about two feet deep.

Like I said, I’m no expert. Maybe what they were doing was perfectly fine. Maybe that’s what people do in southern Georgia. But it really bugged me. I was thinking, “Should you be doing it that way?” the whole time. And I got to say, I wouldn’t want to be in that cabin in a hurricane. Fortunately, they never get hurricanes in Georgia, right?

Building on the sand? Perhaps. A disaster in the making? Maybe. That’s how Jesus describes what it’s like when we hear his words but don’t put them into practice. It is the complacency of knowing about God without really knowing God.

The rabbis of Jesus’ day were known to argue about the question, “Which is more important? Hearing God’s Word or obeying God’s Word?” That’s a silly question. It’s

like asking, “Which is more important for life, food or water?” Take away either one, and you are a goner.

This warning about complacency can be found all through the Bible.

I mentioned King Saul earlier. When King Saul deliberately disobeyed God’s command and got called on the carpet by the prophet, Samuel, he said, “Oh, it’s okay. I’ll make a sacrifice to God.” Samuel famously responded, “Obedience is better than sacrifice.”

In Ezekiel 33, God describes disobedient people who come to hear his prophets, pretending to be sincere, but they have no intention of obeying. We can fool people sometimes, but we can’t fool a God who knows our hearts. Sincerity of love and faith can only be demonstrated by practice of the truth.

In Matthew 3, when John the Baptist was trying to wake people up for the coming of the Messiah, he warned them against complacency. He said, “Don’t sit there, smug in your self-assuredness, saying, ‘It’s fine. We’re the children of Abraham. Nothing to worry about.’”

In Romans 1:18, we are told that the wrath of God is revealed against those who suppress the truth. One way that we can “suppress the truth” is by knowing it and not acting on it. Biblical truth must be lived. It is not just an intellectual thing. Theology is not an academic pursuit but a way of life. Knowing about God is incomplete without becoming more like God through obedience.

In 2 Peter 2, Peter takes it a step further. He says it is better never to know the truth than to reject God’s holy commands. Better never to hear the gospel than to hear it and disobey it.

And finally, in Revelation 3, when Jesus addresses the Church in Laodicea, he laments that they are “lukewarm” in their faith, which sounds a lot like knowing the truth but without obeying it. And I think you know how that part goes: “Because you are neither hot nor cold, I will spew you out of my mouth.” Not good. God does not care for complacency. It offends him.