

No Offense

When Offense Feels Justified

September 20

Introduction

Aloha everyone! I'm Mark and I want to welcome you to our service. Today we are continuing a brand new series called, *No Offense*. Jesus told His disciples that it would be impossible for no offenses to come. He also said a time would come where many would be offended, betray one another, and hate one another. At that time, the love of most would grow cold. We learned that offense, when taken, has the ability to rob us of our love, our joy, and our passion. The seed of offense bears fruit to bitterness, resentment, and unforgiveness. This is why the devil baits Christians through the trap of offense. Once we give in to offense we are ensnared in the devil's trap and held captive to do his will.

After service, Makana who is a student at Leilehua High School came up to me with his notes. He said, "Pastor Mark, while you were talking I saw offense as a fence." He said, "You know when people say they're on the fence it means they're indecisive. Can offense do that?" I thought that was so profound.

"A brother offended is harder to win over than a fortified city," (Proverbs 18:19).

Many times when we are offended we build walls to defend ourselves against future attacks. And we isolate within our walls and fence off the rest of the world so that we don't get offended again. That's why Proverbs says an offended person is like a fortified city. But what many don't realize is that what starts as a fence, can grow into a fortress, that eventually becomes a prison. The same walls meant to keep hurt out traps us in. And this is exactly where the enemy wants you, cut off, isolated, and immobilized.

So in the wise words of Makana,

1. OFFENSE KEEPS YOU ON A FENCE, AND BUILDS A FENCE BETWEEN YOU AND OTHERS.

How many of you want to get over offense? Reminds me of a funny story. Both of my Grandparents on my Dad's side immigrated to America from the Philippines. In fact, my Dad was 3 when he moved from the Philippines to the United States. So growing up he had a strong Filipino accent. And one day in school his teacher said, "Mike, I want you to use these words in a sentence. The words are deduct, defense, defeat, detail." And my Dad thought and thought until finally he said, "I have it! Deduct jump over defense, first defeat then detail!" We're talking about overcoming offense. So make like deduct and jump over defense.

Joseph

How do we get over offense in our lives? Especially when we feel completely justified in our offense? Today we're going to look at the story of someone, whom most would say, had every right to be offended. This individual endured injuries and injustices most of us could only dream of. Today we're talking about Joseph.

Joseph was one of 12 brothers. Spoiler alert, these 12 brothers would eventually become the 12 tribes of Israel. They are very important to God's plan. But before they could fulfill their God-given destinies, Satan had a plan to derail the entire operation. Of the 12 sons, Joseph was his father's favorite. Jacob had 12 sons and he made it very obvious that Joseph was his favorite.

I remember reading this as a young person thinking, “How could Jacob do that? Have a favorite?” Then I had kids. I’m kidding. I love all of my children the same. I just like some better. But I would never go around televising that. And that’s where Jacob went wrong. He made it obvious. The Bible says he dressed Joseph better than his siblings. I get it if you have 11 boys and you finally got your girl so she’s your princess, but dressing one brother better than the other 11 is crazy work. And Joseph wasn’t even the oldest. He was second youngest among his brothers.

To make matters worse, Joseph started having these dreams from the Lord where the rest of his family was bowing down to him. And every time he would have one of these dreams he would share it with the family. Do you think they got offended? I should say so. But what started as a seed of offense eventually grew into hatred and betrayal.

One day, Joseph’s father sent him on an errand to his brothers and when they saw him off in the distance, this was their response,

19 “Here comes that dreamer!” they said to each other. 20 “Come now, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we’ll see what comes of his dreams,” (Genesis 37:19-20 NIV).

So it’s clear that the hatred his brothers had for him stemmed directly from their offense over his dreams. But just as his brothers are about to kill him, God sends a caravan of slave traders. And instead of killing him right then and there, the brothers decide to profit off of Joseph’s death.

26 “Judah said to his brothers, “What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? 27 Come, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.” His brothers agreed,” (Genesis 37:26-27 NIV).

Even though they have a sudden change of heart, I would not say they were moved with compassion. I believe their primary motivator was greed. What will we gain if we kill him? Let’s sell him instead and make some money. He’s as good as dead anyway.

And this was a death sentence. Neither Joseph nor his brothers had any reason to believe they would ever see one another again. Joseph was to be carried off to Egypt where he would become someone else’s property for the rest of his days.

I want us to pause right now and think about this offense. How many of us would say that Joseph had every right to be offended? He’s being sold into slavery at the hands of his own family. More often than not, the closer the relationship, the greater the offense. It is the people we allow closest to us that have the ability to hurt us the most because we place higher expectations on them. Look what the Psalmist writes,

12 “If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were rising against me, I could hide. 13 But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, (Psalms 55:12-13).

We expect our enemies and our foes to offend us so it doesn’t affect us as much. But when it’s a close friend, a family member, or someone we trust, the expectations are higher. Like Joseph, some of you have experienced tremendous injustice from people close to you.

The Bible tells us that Joseph was 17 when this happened. And for the better part of his young life he is either enslaved or imprisoned. Upon arriving in Egypt he is sold to one of Pharaoh's officials named Potiphar who is the captain of the guard. We aren't sure exactly how long Joseph serves Potiphar but we know it is long enough for two things to happen. The first is that, with the Lord's help, Joseph proves his dependability to Potiphar and is eventually promoted to attendant (or overseer). As the overseer, Joseph is given authority over all of Potiphar's affairs. The second thing that happens is that Joseph grows up into a handsome young man and catches the eye of Potiphar's wife. The Bible says that Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph on a daily basis. It got to the point that Joseph not only refused to lay with her but even be near her. He had to constantly avoid her daily advances.

To me this is a clue that Joseph is processing his offense in a healthy way. Because one of the most dangerous things offense does is it makes us justify sin. Joseph doesn't allow someone else's sin against him to become his excuse to sin against others.

2. WHEN WE FEEL JUSTIFIED IN OUR OFFENSE, WE FEEL JUSTIFIED IN OUR RESPONSE.

Cain was offended by God's acceptance of Abel and murdered his brother in cold blood. Saul was offended by David's success and justified his desire to kill him. Jonah was offended by God's grace toward Nineveh and felt justified in his anger toward them. The older brother in the prodigal son was offended by his father's grace toward his brother and felt justified in his indignation.

So in the same way, Joseph could have said, "Hey, I've been through a lot. I deserve this." Or "I don't owe my master anything. After everything I've done for him. He should be thanking me. Besides, she's the one pursuing me." Or how about, "God has clearly forgotten about me so why should I still try to live for Him." Let's see how Joseph responds.

⁸ "But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. ⁹ No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:8-9 NIV).

Despite everything he has endured, Joseph still fears the Lord and lives with integrity. He does not allow offense to justify his response. He does not allow someone else's sin to excuse his own.

It would seem Joseph has passed the test. But his trials are only beginning. Potiphar's wife takes offense to Joseph and frames him for assaulting her. When Potiphar hears of this he has Joseph thrown into prison. Once again, this looks like a dead end. Joseph had no reason to believe he would ever see freedom or the light of day again. Of Joseph, the Psalmist writes,

¹⁷ "and he sent a man before them—Joseph, sold as a slave. ¹⁸ They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons," (Psalm 105:17-18).

This was not a white-collar federal prison with a bunk, a basketball court, and three square meals. Joseph was thrown into a dank dungeon in fetters and left to rot for years of his life. First he was betrayed by his own brothers and sold into slavery, now he's been framed for a crime he didn't commit and left to die in the dungeon. It would've been so easy for Joseph to be offended and no one would blame him! It would've been so easy for Joseph to play the victim card and blame everyone for his troubles.

“If only my brothers hadn’t sold me here, I’d be at home with my family probably living my dreams.” “If only Potiphar’s wife hadn’t framed me, I’d probably still have my job.” “If only Potiphar had believed me instead of siding with his wife. Doesn’t he know I’ve been nothing but faithful to him?” But here’s the amazing thing Joseph understood and what we need to understand whenever we experience offense or injustice.

3. WHEN WE BLAME OTHERS, WE GIVE THEM THE FINAL WORD.

Joseph understood that despite everything, God was still working. He understood that people can affect our circumstances but only God controls our destiny. He understood that no power on earth could remove him from God’s will — not his brothers, not Potiphar’s wife, not even Pharaoh himself. God wasn’t sitting up in heaven thinking, “Oh no! Joseph’s been thrown into prison! There goes my one chance at saving humanity!” In the same way, when we blame others for what is happening to us in life we give them more authority than God. We’re saying that their ability to destroy us is greater than God’s ability to deliver us. We’re saying that their ability to tear us down is greater than God’s ability to raise us up. We’re saying that their ability to steal from us is greater than God’s ability to provide. The truth is that nobody has the power to stop God’s plan from being realized in your life. Joseph didn’t take the bait of offense and forfeit the will of God over his life. Even when he was in prison, he didn’t grow bitter he grew better. He knew that it was God who delivered him from the pit and it would only be a matter of time before God delivered him from this prison. But God needed to ensure that Joseph’s heart was completely free of offense so that he would be able to pass the greatest test of all.

In a miraculous turn of events Joseph is brought out of prison and taken before Pharaoh so that he could interpret Pharaoh’s dream. Not only does God give Joseph the interpretation of the dream, he gives him divine wisdom to save the entire kingdom from famine. Pharaoh recognizes the Spirit of God in Joseph and appoints him to the second-highest position in all of Egypt. No one in all of Egypt is above Joseph except Pharaoh himself.

At this point in the story Joseph is 30 years old. He was 13 years a slave. He has endured betrayal, slavery, false accusations, imprisonment and abandonment. He had many opportunities to take offense and become a bitter, resentful and unforgiving person. Nobody would have blamed him for playing the victim card. But he didn’t do that. He didn’t blame God, He didn’t even blame his brothers who had betrayed him. He continued to believe that despite every offense and every injustice, a good God still sat on the throne and that he would see God’s promises fulfilled in his life.

Joseph was eventually reunited with his brothers. And when they saw him they didn’t recognize him. For all they knew, he was the second most powerful person in all of Egypt. And Joseph’s dream from when he was 17 came to pass. His brothers all bowed before him. But could you imagine if Joseph had been grinding his axe this whole time? Could you imagine if he was still harboring offense? He is the second most powerful man in the world. He literally holds his brothers lives in the palm of his hand. But just listen to the response of Joseph to his brothers,

¹⁹ “But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. ²¹ So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them,” (Genesis 50:19-21 NIV).

Conclusion

Joseph had concluded that even though his brothers had sent him to Egypt, God had the final say. God was working in the midst of all the offense. God was turning pain into purpose. And Joseph would not serve as judge and jury. He said, "Am I in the place of God?" When you can entrust your pain to God, you will see Him working in the midst of it and you will trust Him to set things right and be perfectly just on your behalf.

Group Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever experienced betrayal by someone you trusted? How did your closeness, trust, or expectations of that person impact the offense?
2. Have you ever built a fence because of offense? How might those walls meant to keep hurt out also be trapping you in?
3. Has there been a time when God turned your pain into purpose? How have you seen God work in the midst of hardships and can you continue to entrust your hurts to Him?

Closing Prayer

As we pray, I want you to remember what Joseph said. He said to his brothers, "You intended to harm me." He didn't excuse what they did, he didn't minimize it, he didn't try to convince himself it wasn't wrong. He said, "You meant to hurt me." But God I gave God the final say. Is there an offense in your life that you can name? You can honestly say, "You intended to harm me." Name that offense in your spirit right now. Now can you release it to God and say, "But God gets the final say. He's not finished working. He will redeem it for good to accomplish His will." And like Joseph, do you need to ask yourself, "Am I in the place of God?" Am I trying to play God? Am I trying to make this person feel the weight of what they've done to me? Am I trying to even the scales? Sometimes the greatest test is not what we do when someone has power over us but when we have power over them. Are you using any power or influence to get back at someone? Release that to the Lord and confess, "I am not in the place of God. Lord, take care of it in Your perfect way and in Your perfect timing." Amen.

This week we learned that offense is not the end of the story. Regardless of what other have done to us, God controls our destiny. Next week we will learn how to partner with God in the midst of offense and not circumvent what He is trying to accomplish.