

Offenses

by Gareth Evans

The sermon addresses the pervasive issue of offense in the church and encourages believers to choose reconciliation and unity over division.

Duration: 47:54

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 11:2-6, Matthew 13:21, Matthew 13:57, Matthew 26:8, Luke 4:18-19, John 1:29

Topics: "Offenses"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal story of their radical conversion to Christianity. They recall a time when they were invited to give their testimony and sing at a meeting in a village called Cairo. On the train ride back, they and a small group of friends were singing Christian songs, but when they reached a high note, everyone else went quiet except for the speaker. The speaker then goes on to explain a parable from the Bible about the seed sown on stony ground, relating it to young people who receive the gospel gladly but struggle when they hear about the sacrifices and challenges of following Christ. The speaker also discusses the danger of allowing offenses to hinder one's spiritual growth and shares examples of monkeys in Gibraltar and a church worship team to illustrate this point.

Transcript

I'm on. It's a joy to be with you. Last time I stood in this pulpit was to celebrate Denzel and Rhodes's 70th wedding anniversary.

50th only. For four years my wife Anne and I had the privilege of working on the Anastasis in West Africa, the medical mercy ship, and the privilege of being passers there to the crew of 350. After finishing there we returned to Victoria and the first weekend home I went to visit a former member of my church.

He said how delighted he was to see me and I expressed the same sentiment to him and then I added I will be in church on Sunday. He said, oh good, he said, everybody will be so pleased to see you. I said, well I'm looking forward to it.

And he said, but it's a good job you weren't there last Sunday. I said, why, what happened last Sunday? Oh, he said, the young people led the worship. It was awful.

The drums were so loud and the guitars were so fast and we had to stand and sit and everybody, the songs we didn't know, it was awful. Everybody was offended. And I said, well I wouldn't have been

offended.

Oh yes you would, he said. I said, I wouldn't have been offended. He said, oh yes you would.

Oh no I wouldn't. Oh yes you would. He said, some people even got up and left.

He said, they walked out. I said, you mean the weaker brethren? No, no, he said, some of the seniors. I said, exactly, the weaker brethren.

I'm a senior so I can say that. The Bible talks about weaker brethren, those who cannot handle the changes that happen in church, feast days, etc. I remember when I was a young Christian, I came to the Lord at the age of 17, a radical conversion, and I remember how offensive I was to some of the seniors in the church.

Not meaning to be, but my ways were different. And so I've learned to tolerate the ways of young people today that are so different. I said to my friend, I would not be offended.

He said, yes you would. I said, no I wouldn't. Yes you would.

I said, brother, I would not have been offended. He said, you don't mean to tell me you like that kind of music. I said, no I don't.

I said, in fact, I like quiet meditative music. I don't like that kind, but I would not have been offended. Yes you would.

I said, brother, I would not have been offended. He looked at me and I said, I would not have been offended because I choose not to be offended. I want to speak to you this morning about offense.

We're all aware that the Word of God speaks much about those who cause offense. It would be better for your eye to be plucked out or your hand to be chopped off rather than to cause offense to one of these little ones. But I want to speak this morning about those who take offense.

Do you know that when I was a pastor, I used to receive a quarterly magazine called Leadership Magazine for Pastors and Elders of Churches. Very, very fine magazine. And every issue would deal with certain different aspects.

And I remember the one that they did a survey on why missionaries leave the mission field. There's a high percentage of missionaries, you know, in my denomination, they train for nine years before they go to the field. They spend three years on the field and they return to Canada and a large percentage of them never return to the field.

And they surveyed these missionaries who had returned home. And the number one reason why missionaries never returned to the field, that superseded all other reasons put together, has nothing to do with visas and difficulties, had nothing to do with sickness, had nothing to do with children's education, had nothing to do with persecution. The number one reason above all others put together was that the missionaries could not get on with other missionaries.

They were offended by something the field director had said or done. Offense has become one of the greatest divisors in the church. Churches are split over people being offended by the youth music or the color of the decor or something.

And Satan gloats. I'd like to speak this morning about what it means when we allow offenses to come. I remember once as a schoolteacher I took a party of students to Gibraltar, the Rock of Gibraltar.

And if you take a tour of the rock, you will take you up the Rock of Gibraltar to the top where there's a wonderful scene. But on halfway up they stop on the tours, the buses and the taxis, because there's a colony of monkeys there. Many, many hundreds of monkeys.

They're known as the apes of Gibraltar or they're well known. And on the side of the road it says very clearly, do not feed the monkeys. Do not play with the monkeys.

But you know people do not listen to signs like that. And so they go close to monkeys and sooner or later a monkey will jump on someone's shoulder. And the woman, it's usually a woman, says oh John look, get your camera quick.

And so John comes with his camera, take a photograph of this monkey on the shoulder. But monkeys have a habit you know of playing with your hair. And they get their fingers tangled in their hair.

Oh he's pulling my hair John, look at him. Get off, stop it, stop it, stop it, stop it, stop it. And soon the playful monkey has become a great hindrance and barrier.

Offences are just like that. I remember the time I was invited to speak at a little church in Esquimalt. And Ann and I arrived there early and the worship team were practicing at the front of this little church.

There's no bigger than the crossroads of your church here at the front. And Ann said to me, I think we better sit right at the back today. And I agreed with her because the practice, if there was any example of what was going to happen later in the service, we were going to be deafened.

But I looked at the group who were leading the worship and the young man who was the lead singer had a ring in his lip. The young man who played the drums was a cowl down like a monk. He couldn't see his face at all.

And the young woman who was going to be the singer had red spiked hair. Everything that was anathema to my Christian upbringing. If I had been offended as I could so easily have been and I left that church, I had to stay because I was speaking.

But if I had left, I would have missed one of the most precious worship times I've ever experienced. When those three young people plus the other young people led us that day in that service. But you see that little I could have got offended with a ring in the lip would have been enough to offend me.

Leave alone the red spiked hair. Man, that really was enough to offend me. And they would have been just like the tangling of the monkey's fingers in my ear.

I want to speak about what happens when we allow the monkey to come on our shoulders. Be sure of this. Jesus said in Luke chapter 17 verse 1, be sure of this, offenses will come.

You're going to be offended. I don't know what it is that offends you. We all get offended.

Let me just say one thing more before I look at the Scriptures in this. I am NOT talking about sin. If somebody sins against you, tell lies about you, does something to you, steals from you, whatever it is, robs your reputation, whatever it might be.

If someone sins against you, the Bible is very clear what you are to do. You are to go to that person. You're to talk to them about the offense, about the sin.

You're to seek to be reconciled with them. You do not go and say, you sinned against me. I'm going to tell all the church about you, what you've done.

You're never going to sing in church. That's not what the Scriptures say. You're to go to the person to seek to be reconciled.

The whole context of that chapter in Matthew is about reconciliation. If he will not listen to you, you take somebody else with you. If he still does not listen, you bring it to the church.

The purpose being reconciliation. When you have been sinned against, I am NOT talking about being sinned against. I'm talking about being offended.

We're offended when we have personality clashes. We're offended when somebody does something we would have done some other way. We don't like it.

We're offended when somebody is chosen over us to lead the singing and we think we should do it. We're offended by myriads of different things that offend us, none of which are sins. But our response can easily become sin.

For example, it was Cain who first brought an offering to God. It was Cain who had heard from his parents that God was in that garden that was sealed off. It was Cain who decided first he wanted to come to God.

And all he had, because he was the keeper of the fields, all he had was the grain and the storage, so he brought a wonderful offering of fruit and vegetables to God. There was nothing at all wrong with his heart or his willingness to bring an offering from the human perspective. Abel sees his brother doing this and Abel decides to bring something that he's got, but he doesn't look after the fields.

All he does is look after the sheep. So he brings one of the lambs. And God chooses to accept Abel's sacrifice because he wants us to learn that the approach to God is only through the shed blood.

There was no way Cain and Abel knew that, but God wanted us to learn that. But Cain is offended and God turns to Cain in Genesis and he says these words to him, Cain, doest thou write to be offended? Cannot I choose whichever one I wish to? Be careful, Cain, because sin lies at the door and is waiting to take you. Cain had not yet sinned.

He was offended, but he had not yet sinned. But his offense led to the sin of murder. We need to be careful to distinguish between the two.

I am speaking about the things that offend you this morning, not when somebody's sinned against you. And I'm going to take you into five scriptures. I invite you to have your Bibles with you to look at these.

And I'm going to show you five scripture verses where it speaks of offense. Now the word offense might not appear in your translation, but I assure you in the Greek, in all five of these verses, the Greek word translated is skandalitso, to be offended. It's from the verb skandalitso.

It's in all five of them. It's translated in different ways, offended, stumbling, fall, different ways in your version. But I assure you in the Greek, it's the same Greek word.

My first two references are found in Matthew chapter 13. I invite you to turn them with me. I will read the context to you of each of these.

I'm looking first, and my first verse is in verse 21. But let me read the context. Matthew 13, 21 is my first reference verse.

And I notice you've got pieces of papers in your bulletin. You can write these down, so I invite you to do so. The context is the parable of the sower and the seed.

Jesus interprets this parable. It's one of only two parables that he interprets. He says the seed that was sown upon the stony ground is like the man or woman who hears the Word of God and receives it gladly.

This is the picture, if you like, of the young man or woman who hears the gospel that Jesus has died upon the cross to forgive you your sins, to cleanse you, to give you victory over the drug habit you have, whatever it might be. And they say, yes, I need that. They receive it gladly.

And they become an instant Christian. And the following Sunday they come to church. And the pastor starts preaching that those who follow Christ must need to take up their cross and follow him.

There are things in our life that we must lay aside because they're not appropriate to the Christian life. And the young man, the young woman says, I wasn't told that when I gave my heart to Jesus. I don't like that kind of gospel.

I like the free and easy, no responsibility gospel. I want to be free, as Jesus promised me. And he is offended, said Jesus, by the Word.

And he falls away because he has no root. He is offended by the Word. What is the result of his offense? Well, that seed that was produced, that was put in the ground, produced no fruit.

And the first effect or result of you allowing that monkey to stay on your shoulder will be that you will produce no fruit. Now, I don't know about you, but I want to produce fruit in my life. I want the fruit of the Spirit in my life.

I want the fruit of love and joy and peace and gentleness and goodness in me. I want that fruit to grow in my life. The one hindrance to the fruit of the Spirit growing in my life is when I allow offenses to remain upon me.

Something you've said, something you've done, something the pastor did, I'm offended by it. When I allow that to remain and I choose not to remove it, I risk losing fruit in my life. My second example is found in the same chapter.

I come toward the end of the chapter and I read these words, that Jesus has come into his hometown. I'm looking now at the section beginning in 53 and the key verse is 57, Matthew 13, 57. Jesus comes into his hometown.

He stands up in the synagogue and he begins to preach. Some of the older men in the congregation start looking at one another and they start murmuring and they say, who does this young man think he is, speaking to us like this? He's the carpenter's boy. We know his family well.

We know his brothers and his sisters and who do you think he is coming here? He hasn't been to any seminary and he's speaking to us like this. He doesn't belong to the Sadducees or the Pharisees, he's not one of these, he's a carpenter. And they were offended at him.

There's a story in the Old Testament in the book of Kings about a prophet. One day his two sons came home to him. They said, dad, daddy should have been with us today in the marketplace.

There's a young man there, he's a prophet come from God, he's a prophet like you dad. The old man says, prophet? In our town? Yeah, they said, dad, he's preaching thus saith the Lord, it's wonderful, you should have heard him. I'm the prophet around here.

You can tell that young man I'd like to talk with him. The two boys rushed back into the marketplace, they see the young prophet and say, our dad wants to talk to him. You know, our dad's a prophet, he's been prophesying for 40 years, you know.

Our dad's a known, come and meet our dad. The young man says, no I can't, but God has told me to go to the next town and to prophesy there. Ooh.

So they go back and they tell the old man. And the old man is offended. And she says to his young boys, you go back and tell him I've heard from God, and God says he's to come here for lunch.

The young man goes, two boys go back, they see the young prophet. Our dad has had a word from God, and our dad says, God said he'd to come for lunch. And the young man, who's a new in the faith and walking with God, says, oh, if the old man thinks that, then obviously he's closer to God than I am, I'd better go.

And so he goes and has lunch. And the old man smiles nicely and hypocritically, and they have lunch. And then he says to the young man, because you've disobeyed God, you shall no longer serve him.

And that day a bear takes this young man and he is destroyed. There is many, many, many a ministry that God was designed to be upon the Naimo, even maybe in your church that has been destroyed because some older person has been offended. When I became a Christian, I was 17 years of age.

My conversion was radical. And our pastor invited the young people to go up the valleys to a little village called Caira, north of Bridgend in Wales. And we were to give testimonies and sing at this meeting in the town hall.

And I remember I was brand new Christian, and we were so excited about this meeting, and I had to give my testimony. And coming back down the valley in the train, we were singing. There was a lot of people on the train, but the group of about five or six of us, we were singing Christian songs.

And somebody struck up a song, maybe it was the one we just sang as a hymn, I don't remember. But you know what happens when you pitch a song and they pitch it too high? You come in the chorus, and in the chorus there's that note. And as you approach it, you realize you've pitched too high.

You're not going to meet it, you know? You ever experience that? So everybody at that note went quiet, except me. And I went for the note, and I missed it by about an octave and a half. And one of our dear old ladies was further down the carriage from me, and she turned and looked at me.

I went up to her, and she said, do you have a Bible, young man? I said, yes. She said, get your Bible. I had a brand new Bible.

Black leather, gold on the outside. It was so new, I had not even written my name in it. I was a brand new Christian.

This was a holy book. She turned to the virgin white pages at the back of my Bible, and then took a pen out and scrawled right across the page, God is ready to be feared in the assembly of the saints. Oh, I am so glad that the work that was done on Calvary for me was sufficient to carry the pain that I felt through that woman's offense.

She had no idea how close she was to putting me out of the kingdom, or putting me out of my walk. But God has done a good work in Calvary, and he kept me. But she was offended, because I missed a note.

Was I sinning? I was not sinning, I wasn't singing either. But this old prophet is the same. He was offended, because a young man was in his territory, and as a result of that, this young man's ministry was destroyed.

Jesus stands up in the synagogue, and he preaches, and the people are offended. What was the result of their offense? The scriptures tell me in the next few verses, and Jesus could do few miracles in that place. In the next village, there was a man born blind.

Jesus came and touched him, and he received his sight. But the blind in his home village remained blind. There's a man with leprosy in this village over here, and Jesus came and healed him.

But the lepers in his own village remained leprous. In this village over here, there was a man who had died, and Jesus raised him from the dead. But in his own village, the dead were buried.

Because he could do no miracles in that place, because of their offense. When you allow a monkey of offense to remain upon you, you risk losing not only your fruit, but also the supernatural work of God. Do you want to see the supernatural work of God in your church? Do you want to see prayers answered? That's supernatural.

Do you want to see your prayers answered? Do you want to see Nanaimo impacted with the gospel? One of the greatest barriers to the gospel in Nanaimo is the amount of Christians who are carrying monkeys on their shoulders. And divisions in churches is one of the greatest barriers. Let me take you to my third example.

It's found in Matthew 26. The section begins at verse 6, and my key verse is verse 8. A woman comes down in Bethany, and she has an alabaster vial of very costly perfume. And she breaks it upon the feet of Jesus, and she washes his feet with her tears, and wipes his feet with her hair.

And my Bible reads to me, and the disciples were offended. And they said, why this waste? Why didn't she sell this perfume and bring the money in, so we could give it to the poor? Now I deliberately have read it from Matthew, and I'll show you the reason why. But in John's gospel, the same story is recorded there.

But John records these words, and Judas was offended. And they said, why this waste? But he really wasn't interested in the poor. He wanted the money, because he kept the purse, and he was a thief.

That's what John says. But I've deliberately read this one from Matthew, because in this scripture, it tells me the result of their offense. So the next section reads this way, and Judas got up, and walked out, and betrayed his Lord.

The result of his offense was that he lost confidence in Jesus, and so went to betray him. Did he intend for Jesus to be put to death? I don't think so. I think like all the disciples, Judas' understanding of the kingdom that Jesus had come to establish, their understanding was an earthly kingdom.

And they were looking for Jesus to establish his kingdom, to overthrow the Roman rule. And he wanted to push a little bit, to promote a little bit, to add on a little bit, to force Jesus into establishing his kingdom. For he did not understand, but he was offended.

And he goes and loses confidence in Jesus, and so betrays him. My fourth example is found in the same chapter. Jesus says to his disciples, having come out of the upper room, and coming to the garden, he said, this night you will all be offended because of me.

My version says, you will all fall away. It's the same Greek word, scandal, and so you will all be offended because of me this night. You're not going to understand what's going to happen to me.

You're going to see the soldiers come and take me. You're going to see me beaten and smitten. You're going to see me put upon a cross.

You're not going to understand. You're going to all be offended because of me this night. Peter, I love Peter.

Peter is very much like many of us. If Peter walked into this room, you'd recognize him easily. He would smell a fish, but he's also got a mouth that's shaped like a foot.

He is always saying the wrong thing. Have you noticed that? He does exactly that right now. He said, Jesus, I won't be offended.

No way. Everybody else might be offended. Everybody else might be offended because they don't understand, but not me.

You can come to me. I won't be offended. And Jesus said, Peter, before the cockerel crows this night, you're going to deny me three times.

And Jesus is taken into Pilate's judgment hall. All the other disciples flee. Judas commits suicide.

John goes right into the judgment hall. He's got, obviously, friends who allow him to get in. Peter doesn't get into the judgment hall, but he's in the kitchen next door.

All the other disciples have fled. That's not to be too hard upon Peter. He's at least there.

A little girl comes up to him and she says, you belong to Jesus, don't you? Jesus? What do you mean, Jesus? Jesus is a fairly common name. Jesus is the man in there. Oh, I don't know him.

I've never seen him before. Pardon, Peter? This is your closest friend. This is the one you've been with three years.

This is the one you saw on the Mount of Transfiguration. This is the one who, three hours ago, you said you would never deny. Never seen him before.

Then a man comes up to him and says, I saw you in the garden. You're one of Jesus's men. What's going on here, Peter? I don't know that criminal in there.

What's that? I didn't know him. Leave me alone. And somebody else comes up and says, you're a Galilean.

You're one of Jesus's men. Your speech betrays, just like mine is the Welsh accent. He has an accent from Galilee.

And Peter begins to curse and swear and deny his Lord. And the cockerel crowed. Cock-a-doodle-doo.

What has happened? Peter's offended. He doesn't understand what's happening and he's offended. And because of his offense, he has lost his testimony.

See, I wonder what would have happened if the little girl had said to him, you belong to Jesus, don't you? I wonder what would have happened if he had said yes. I wonder if her next words might have been, tell me about him. Please tell me about him.

I want to know more about him. But he denied him. And how many Christians live out a life of denying their Lord and losing their testimony? How many churches have lost their testimony and been divided because of some person's offense? I can take you to churches.

I can take you to places where churches used to be. I attended a church in Wales. I won't tell you the whole story.

It grew to over 400 people. I tell you the offense. One day the pastor was serving communion and he served the bread.

The congregation had been served the bread. The pastor glanced at his watch. He said, oh my goodness, is that the time? I didn't realize it was so late.

I'll tell you what we're going to do, he said. We're going to adjourn the service right now and I'm going to invite you to come back this evening. They always had an evening service.

And we'll have the wine this evening. That's strange. It's very strange, eh? Very strange.

Three men in the congregation, one former pastor, one elder, and one other man, were so offended they wrote to the district superintendent, who came to the church and met with the entire congregation. Came out with a decision that it was not wrong, that it happened, it was unwise. And he reprimanded the pastor gently.

He said, young man, just don't do this again. Be careful. It's not wise to do.

But now the pastor's offended. So the following Sunday he left the denomination, took all his congregation with him to a hall a hundred yards up the road. Three years later that church disintegrated into multifactions that everybody in Wales knew about at the time.

In fact, years later I went back to Britain and I was in another city in another place in England. I said I was from Bridgend, Wales, and they said to me, oh do you belong to that church? Everybody knew of this church and the terrible testing this church had. Because of offense.

When we allow the monkey to stay on our shoulders we risk losing not only our friends, not only the supernatural work of God, not only our confidence, but we risk losing our testimony too. My fifth and final example here is found in John chapter 11. It's a very long and very difficult chapter.

Jesus says words like this, unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no part in me. I'm sorry, John chapter 7. I said 11. John chapter 6. John chapter 6, I'm sorry.

Very long chapter. As you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no part in me. I'm looking from verse 60.

My key verse is 61. Many of his disciples when they heard this, they said this is difficult to understand. We don't understand this.

But Jesus realized and they grumbled, said does this cause you offense? Eat my flesh and drink my blood? Of course it sounds offensive, but you and I have the value of hindsight. We understand more what he said because they're at the communion table. That is exactly what we are doing.

The last night before he died, Jesus knowing he was about to die, knowing he was about to die, called his disciples together. If I knew I was going to die next week, I tell you right now I'd be dealing with priorities in my life. I love sport but I wouldn't be watching sport on my TV if I knew I had three days to live.

I want to make sure my daughters knew that I loved them, my wife knew that I loved her, that I was leaving no problems behind after my death. I'd want to deal with priorities. And Jesus is going to deal with priorities in the upper room.

And so to his disciples he promises them some wonderful things. He promises peace the world cannot give or take away. He promises them joy that will be shaken down, pressed together, running over, joy that will fill them.

He promises them the Holy Spirit to dwell within them. He promises them a home in heaven he is going to prepare for them and that he will return many wonderful promises. And I believe he means to keep those promises.

Do you? When Jesus makes promises, not only to the twelve but to us too, those promises are for us. The next day upon a cross he signed his name to those promises in blood, guaranteed them with the death of the cross. But that room, that upper room, he asked three things of his disciples.

As he washed their feet he said to them, so do I want you to do to one another. I want you to live a life of refreshing one another. That's what foot washing is.

I don't think he calls us to do it physically, though that's a wonderful experience to have. But every time I come to church I come for three reasons. I come to hear the Word of God.

I come to express my love to God. And I come to have my feet washed. You see you can't spend one hour in this world without the dirt of this world washing off or rubbing off on you.

You watch your TV programs. How many TV programs can you read, can you watch today without dirt upon it? You can't work in your offices, you can't work and you be in your schools without the dirt of this world rubbing off on you. And when I come into the house of God I come here to have my feet washed.

I come here to meet brothers and sisters who can greet me. I come here to be pointed again to the cross of Jesus and to the love of Jesus. So I leave here refreshed.

It's one of the things that Jesus asked us to be as refreshers of one another. Then he said a new commandment I give you that you love one another. There's no options here.

The King has commanded you to love one another. He didn't say love those of the same denomination. Those who are Baptist you can love them but don't love the Pentecostals or the Catholics that know the Lord.

And there are many. I do not like the liturgy. I do not like their form of worship maybe.

I do not like some of the things about them but I'm commanded to love them and I have no option. And the third thing he asked his disciples in his upper room as a priority was this. He said if you're my disciples do what I tell you.

Obey my word. And the calling of a Christian today is to be a servant, to be a lover and to be obedient to his word. That is what Jesus asked of his disciples in the upper room when he made those promises.

And having said those things he then took the bread. He said take this bread. It's my body.

And every time I eat his flesh, drink, take the bread, I'm identifying myself with the body of Christ. I'm an Alliance pastor. I'm preaching today in a Baptist Church.

I speak in Brethren churches and Anglican churches but I am more than all of that. I am a kingdom Christian. I belong to the kingdom of Christ.

I belong to the one church of which Jesus Christ is the head. I may not be an arm. I may not be a foot.

I may not be an eye but I am part of the body of Christ. In fact people often ask me what part of the body I am and I say I'm a big toe. They say what do you mean a big toe? I'm a pastor.

They say well what's that got to do with being a big toe? I say well as a pastor I'm used to working in dark smelly places. But more than that I'm used to being under pressure. But I delight to be a big toe because I want my teaching to bring balance to the body of Christ.

There's a lot of teaching out there that is unbalanced. And so when I take the bread I identify myself with the body. When I eat the flesh, when I drink the blood, I'm saying yes to the covenant that Jesus has made with us.

I'm signing my name to the covenant. I'm agreeing to love his people, to serve his people, and to obey the word. And I verbally say that every time I take communion.

And here in John chapter 6 what Jesus is saying to the people is this, unless you are in covenant with me and with one another, eating my flesh, drinking my blood, the call of the communion covenant, you have no part in me. Does this offend you brothers and sisters of this Baptist Church that I tell you you're

commanded to love your Pentecostal brothers? Oh there are many Christians who are offended by that. That is what Jesus is saying.

Does this offend you this call to covenants? And many of them were offended and the result is there it said and from that day many of them walked with him. The result of having a monkey upon your shoulder my brothers and sisters can be that you lose, you risk losing your fruit, you risk losing your confidence, you risk losing your communion, you risk losing your testimony, and you risk losing the supernatural work of God. And I tell you the price is too.

You cannot afford that monkey on your shoulder. This church cannot afford that monkey on your shoulder. This city cannot afford the numbers of Christians and churches with monkeys on their shoulders.

The monkeys will come but you cannot afford to leave them there because you risk losing part of it. Why then doesn't Jesus put the monkeys to death? Wouldn't it be so much easier if Jesus guaranteed that no monkey would ever jump on your shoulder? Why does he allow these monkeys to come when he risks all these things as your response? Why does he allow the lion to roar when the lion has already been defeated and disarmed upon the cross? Why does Jesus allow these things to happen? He allows them to happen so that you and I will learn to be overcomers. Because that's what discipleship is.

Discipleship is facing difficulties, facing monkeys, facing lions, and learning by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit to be overcomers. That is what Jesus allows. I'm going to close by telling you two stories of people well known in the Bible who were offended and I suggest to you that Jesus deliberately offended them.

The first one is found in Matthew chapter 11. Jesus grew up near his cousin John. They're very nearly the same age.

I can imagine these two young boys in their teens being together quite often. They lived close and they were cousins. In fact Mary went to Elizabeth, John's mother, the first person she went to when she knew she was pregnant.

I can imagine these two boys as they grow older lying out in the field looking up at the stars maybe talking about the growing sense of destiny that each of them had. Think of the day when John left home dressed in a camel skin and went out in the desert preaching repentance and calling people back to Yahweh and to orthodoxy. And all those who returned to the Jewish way, he baptized them in Jordan.

He said to them there's one coming after me who is far greater than I am. I'm not worthy to undo the buckle of his shoe. When he comes I must decrease and he must increase.

One day John sees his cousin Jesus come and he says to the people behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. And Jesus comes to John and says John baptize me. John says I can't baptize you.

Jesus said baptize me for righteousness sake John. So John baptizes his cousin in Jordan and as Jesus comes out of the water John sees a dove descend from heaven and a light upon him. And he has a voice saying this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.

And John gives testimony in the book of Acts at the beginning there that he saw the dove and he heard the voice. John knew that this was the promised Messiah. And Jesus begins his ministry and John goes

into decline.

Many of John's disciples begin to follow Jesus. But John can't keep his mouth shut and so he starts speaking out against Herod who's having an affair with his sister-in-law. So Herod in his anger takes John and casts him into the deepest dungeon.

And I can imagine John in prison. Herod you old fool you think you've got me in prison. But my cousin is the Messiah.

And very soon my cousin's going to topple your Roman Empire and establish his kingdom. And very soon Herod you're going to be in here and I'm going to be out there. Because that's exactly what the disciples and all those people thought that Jesus kingdom was going to be.

An earthly kingdom. But days turn into weeks and weeks become months and Jesus doesn't even come to visit his cousin in prison. He doesn't send him a get out soon card or a cake with a file in it.

In fact as far as John is concerned he's forgotten by his cousin Jesus. And so in Matthew chapter 11 it tells me that John takes two of his disciples and sends them to Jesus and they come to Jesus and say to him, tell us are you really the Messiah? Or shall we be looking for somebody else? Now John knew he was the Messiah so why this question? So Jesus says to the disciples go back and tell John what you've seen and heard. Let me go back a few weeks.

When he comes out to the wilderness Jesus stands up in the synagogue and he reads from Isaiah's gospel. He reads these words, the spirit of the Lord is upon me. In Luke chapter 4. For he's anointed me to bring sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, the lame will walk, the dead will rise and the poor will have the gospel preached unto them.

This day the scripture is fulfilled in your ears. Here a month or so later the disciples come to Jesus and say are you truly the Messiah? Or should we look for someone else? Jesus said go and tell John what you've seen and hear. The blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, the dead are raised and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

In other words I'm doing exactly and only what my father anointed me to do. And then he adds these words, Matthew chapter 11. And blessed is he who is not offended by me.

Jesus knew that John was offended. John did not understand what was going on and he was offended. Why did Jesus allow this offense to come? I suggest to you that John had to learn something.

And the very least did John had to learn was this. His agenda is infinitely more important than mine. I think John expected Jesus to come to deliver him from prison.

But that was not Jesus's agenda. Jesus's agenda was to incite the blind, hear the deaf, the lame will walk, the dead will rise. He had administered that God had anointed him for and he was not going to meet somebody else's agenda.

How many Christians get offended because God doesn't meet their agenda? How many prayers we pray and God does not choose to answer the way we want to and we get offended. Pastors build churches and they get into programs and they plan all these ideas and God doesn't seem to bless their church and programs and they get offended. It's always God's problem.

It never was God's problem when men build men's churches. It's never God's problem why they do not grow. My final story.

This one is found in John 11 where I give you the reference wrongly before. Jesus had three very special friends. They were Lazarus, Mary and Martha.

He loved them dearly. A message comes in one day that Lazarus is sick and dying and in John 11 I read a very strange verse. And when Jesus heard this he remained where he was.

Verse 5, John 11. Jesus loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus so when he heard that Lazarus was sick he stayed where he was. Now my first reaction to that would be how callous.

This is his friend who's dying and he has a power to heal him but he stays where he was. Some days later the news comes back. He says to his disciples okay we're now going to go to Jerusalem to Bethany.

His disciples are not very happy about going there because previously there'd been a lot of problems there for them. They said well how is Peter? How is Lazarus? And Jesus said oh he's sleeping. Oh good they said if he's sleeping he must be getting better.

Jesus said guys read my lips. Lazarus is dead. They begin the journey.

It's a short journey. It's a few miles to Bethany. And on the journey Jesus just says one thing to his disciples.

It's a very striking thing. He who walks in the light does not stumble. He's not offended.

But he who walks in the darkness stumbles. He comes to Bethany and instead of entering into the village he sits on a stone outside the village. And Martha comes out to greet him.

That's very striking because every other time you read of Mary and Martha it is Mary who wants to be with Jesus. Mary's always the one with Jesus. So much so that Martha complains about Mary being with Jesus all the time.

If Mary was in this church she'd lead the dance and hallelujah band. She's the one who's prominent up the front. But Martha's the one working in the kitchen.

But it's Martha who comes to Jesus. And she says to Jesus master if you had been here my brother would not have died. And Jesus said Martha your brother will live again.

Yes I know Lord that he'll live again at the great resurrection. Martha I am the great resurrection. Martha turns around and runs back to Mary.

And the Bible tells me that when Martha came out Mary stayed in the house. It's recorded that she stayed. Why does it say she stayed there? Why does it need to say that? Because it wants to point out the difference in this woman's natural cause to be with Jesus and now stay in there.

Martha comes to Mary and says Mary Jesus has called for you. No he hadn't said that at all. That's what she said.

So I can imagine Mary quickly brushing herself and putting makeup on and tidying herself up. But she'd been weeping. Her brother had died.

She's with the mourners. And she comes out to Jesus and she says exactly the same words as Martha. Exactly the same words.

Master if you had been here my brother wouldn't have died. And Jesus wept. Did you ever ask yourself why Jesus wept? Did it suddenly dawn in him the grief that these women were going through? He knew that they'd be grieving.

Did it suddenly dawn on Jesus the great professional weepers and mourners that he could hear them that it suddenly stirred his emotion? Is that why he wept? He had set this whole scenario up. He had stayed. Knowing, waiting until Lazarus had died.

He knew there'd be professional mourners. He knew Mary would grieve. He knew Martha would grieve.

He knew all that. He also knew that during Lazarus's rise. They did not know that.

But at Mary's words Jesus wept. And I would suggest to you that the reason he wept is not the words that she used. For Martha had used the same words.

But the way she'd used them. If you had been here my brother wouldn't have died. They're the words spoken by a woman who's offended.

Because she does not understand. As Jesus had said in the journey. She's walking in darkness.

Is there something Mary should have learned? Yeah. Many things I'm sure. But one of the things you should have learned is this.

A prominence in the kingdom is not as important as faithfulness. Martha was the one on this occasion showed faithfulness. Whereas Mary was offended.

I come to a clause. When you and I allow offenses to come. Whatever the offenses is that bothers you.

And be sure they will come. You have the choice to deal with that a monkey on your shoulders. To cast it off.

To put it to death. And to learn from it by asking the Lord what is it I need to learn from this. Why am I offended? Is it my personality? Is it my pride? What is it in me that needs to be changed because of this experience? So my brothers and sisters if you allow that offense to remain.

You risk losing the fruit of God. You risk losing your confidence in him. You risk losing your testimony.

You risk losing your communion. You risk losing the supernatural work of guardian light. The price is too high.

And when you are offended you cause Satan to bloat. And the Savior to weep. I am totally committed to a life that causes my Jesus to rejoice and Satan to weep.

That means I am quick. I will be quick. I'm determined to be quick.

To remove offenses and to learn from them. May the Lord bless these thoughts to each one of you this morning. May the Lord bless you as you seek a pastor for your church.

May you be wise and sensitive to God's Spirit leading you to the right man to be a pastor. Thank you for allowing me to speak to you this morning. The Lord bless you.

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