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Speaker: Paul McIlwraith, Teaching Pastor
Scripture: Obadiah

You may have noticed that I am wearing two separate shoes today. No, it is not some new fashion statement I am hoping will catch on. I have always been rather picky about the running shoes I wear. I need a brand name like Adidas, Nike or Puma. Are you the same? Let's take a poll, who wears mostly Adidas athletic wear? Nike? Puma? Under Armor?

Did you know that Adidas and Puma, the second and third largest sportswear companies in the world, behind Nike were actually founded by two brothers? In the 1920's the brothers, Adolf and Rudolf Dassler were partners in the Dassler Brothers Sports Shoe Company operating out of their mother's laundry room in the small German town of Herzogenaurach.

In 1936, they convinced legendary track star Jesse Owens to wear their shoes as he competed and ultimately won 4 gold medals at the Berlin Olympics. This gave their shoes international exposure and sales exploded. But their success created tension between the brothers and their families. The conflict escalated to the point that the brothers split the company in two in 1948, dividing the assets and the employees between themselves.

Adolph, who liked to be called, Adi named his company "Adidas," a combination of his first and last names. Rudi attempted the same by first naming his company "Ruda" but eventually changed it to the more athletic sounding "Puma."

The two built competing factories on opposite sides of the town and quickly became responsible for much of Herzogenaurach's economy, with nearly everyone working for one company or the other. But the entire town got caught up in the Dassler family feud. The rivalry reached ridiculous proportions. There were local businesses that served

only Adidas or only Puma people, dating or marrying across company lines was forbidden. Herzogenaurach became known as "the town of bent necks" since people first looked at which company's shoes you were wearing before deciding to talk to you.

Even in death, the animosity continued as the brothers were buried at opposite ends of the same cemetery, as far away from each other as possible.

It wasn't until 2009, long after the brothers had died, when the employees of both companies symbolized the end of decades of feuding by playing a friendly soccer game. Isn't that a sad story of two pretty successful companies, you have to wonder, was it all worth it? Business success at the cost of so many relationships.

Perhaps, you are all too familiar with feuds and the toll it can take on a family. Maybe you have been embroiled in something similar to the Dassler Brothers. It can start so subtly can't it? A misplaced word here or there, a misunderstanding, hurt feelings but it can grow to be so big and so hurtful and have lasting repercussions.

Today, we find ourselves in the third week of our summer message series at North Park entitled, *Majoring on the Minors*.

It is a series on the Minor Prophets in the bible. Their writings comprise the last twelve books of the Old Testament. They're described as "minor" not because they're less important than the books of the Major Prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, but because they're shorter in length. These books contain some challenging words mostly directed at God's people, the Israelites, by his chosen spokesmen, the prophets.

Why? Because they had forgotten or disregarded the relationship they had with God, Yahweh and had turned and worshipped other gods. They had been unfaithful and rebellious towards their heavenly Father. All hope is not lost, however. The Minor Prophets also serve to remind the people of God's faithful and restorative love towards his people.

Two weeks ago, we were challenged by the words in Hosea. Last week, Shane did a great job unpacking Habakkuk and today we come to Obadiah. If you are unfamiliar with Obadiah, it is not surprising. It takes up two pages of over 1300 pages in my bible. It is easy to overlook or skip by but there is a lot jammed in here and worth taking some time to study. If you have your bibles, turn with me to Obadiah. It can be hard to find. Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah. If you get to Jonah and Micah, you have gone too far.

Before I read, I want to give you a bit of context. As I said, the prophets were God's mouthpiece to speak words of rebuke to his people, but there were times when God used them to chastise other nations as well. Obadiah is actually a series of poems of divine judgement against the nation of Edom. At this time, Edom bordered Israel on the other side of the Dead Sea. Edom has an interesting back story just like the back story of Adidas and Puma. The people of Edom had a shared ancestry with the Israelites. Both belonged to the family of Abraham.

Way back in the first book of the bible, God chooses a man, Abraham? He says to him in,

Genesis 12:1-2

"Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation.

Abraham and his wife Sarah have a son, Isaac. Isaac and his wife, Rebekah have twin sons, Jacob and Esau. These two brothers had a tense relationship right from the start. In fact, even in the womb they struggled with each other. When Rebekah cries out to the Lord, he says to her in,

Genesis 25:23

"The sons in your womb will become two nations. From the very beginning, the two nations will be rivals. One nation will be

stronger than the other; and your older son will serve your younger son."

This Family Feud played out throughout Jacob and Esau's lives. Later, they were renamed Israel and Edom and those names became the names of the families that descended from them. These families replayed the same hostilities towards each other as their ancestors. The nations of Israel and Edom had enormous tension throughout the centuries. The Israelites were God's chosen people and the Edomites went on to worship other pagan gods.

At one point in the book of Numbers Chapter 20, as Moses is leading the Israelites to the Promised Land, they needed to pass through the land of Edom. When they asked for permission, the King of Edom responds like this;

Numbers 20:20-21

But the king of Edom replied, "Stay out! You may not pass through our land."

With that he mobilized his army and marched out against them with an imposing force. Because Edom refused to allow Israel to pass through their country, Israel was forced to turn around. So much animosity and yet they still shared ancestry through Abraham.

It was that bond that was forever shattered and betrayed during the tragic events of Israel's fall to Babylon around 586 BC. It is described in 2 Kings 25. When Israel was invaded and conquered by Babylon, what would they expect their neighbour, Edom the one who shares their blood line would do? Surely at this point, they would step in and lend a helping hand, won't they?

My wife, Carolyn and I have twins, too. Just like Isaac and Rebekah had Jacob and Esau, we had Tess and DJ. Oh, they could get on each other's nerves and bicker and squabble amongst themselves but if anyone else picked on the other, they became incredibly protective. I almost suspect that they would kill for each other.

What would you expect Edom to do for their kin, Israel when they were being invaded by Babylon? Send in some reinforcements? Offer safe refuge for those fleeing the country? Help them rebuild. I mean, despite all the bickering and fighting, family is family right? Blood is thicker than water.

Do you want to know how Edom responded? They took advantage of Israel's vulnerable condition. They piled on. When Israel was already down, being beaten by the Babylonians, the Edomites didn't come to the aid of Israel at all. Instead, they plundered them. They captured and even killed Israelite refugees fleeing the carnage.

Do you remember Psalm 137, one of the most dismal passages in the bible? It starts with, By the Rivers of Babylon we sat and wept as we remember Zion. Look at what the Israelites then cry out to God in their misery in this passage;

Palm 137:7

O LORD, remember what the Edomites did on the day the armies of Babylon captured Jerusalem. "Destroy it!" they yelled. "Level it to the ground!"

This is family! Of all people, the Edomites should have put aside their differences and rushed to the aid of their neighbours, Israel. Instead, they gloated over their predicament. They captured and delivered fugitives to the enemy and even looted Israel's countryside. Talk about hitting someone when they are down.

In other prophetic books of the bible, God holds Israel's neighbours accountable for their treatment of the Israelites and here, Obadiah does the same to Edom. But, this is a little different. This was family.

Can you place yourself in what is going on as Obadiah, the prophet is about to speak a word from God to the Edomites? How do you think this is going to go down? Can I give you a little hint? God doesn't like anyone messing with his kids! Do you?

The Israelites were God's chosen people. His sons and daughters. Throughout their history, God had to step in and discipline and punished them as any good Father would but there was always love and mercy and God cared for and protected his children. It is the love of a parent or at least the way a parent should love their children. A parent's love is nurturing and supportive but also protective.

Every time I see this face (picture of my grandson, Beau), I just smile. It doesn't matter what I am doing, when I go onto Instagram and my daughter has posted another picture of Beau. I just smile. I

can't help it. It is the love of a grandfather but do you know what has also given me even greater joy in this season of my life? Watching my daughter become a mom. She and Beau have been living with us over the past week and half.

My son-in-law is a youth pastor and had a group of youth on a short term mission trip so my daughter and Beau came to spend some time with us. I have been in awe of what a great mother Leah has become in such a short time. I don't remember teaching her anything about parenting. She must have gotten it from her mother. She comforts Beau when he is distraught and holds him close and he settles.

She taught him how to crawl this past week, by just her gentle prods and encouraging words. She speaks a stern word when he is fussing and he listens to her and she just seems to have this natural impulse to protect him. She lathers him with lotion before he goes in the sun and puts a hat on him. She steers him away from sharp edges of tables and scoops things out of his path. It is a parents' impulse to protect your children, or at least it should be.

This gives you a bit of a sense of how our heavenly Father feels towards his children. He loves and nurtures, disciplines and punishes when needed but he also protects them. To be a child of God is to receive his love and protection.

That leads us into Obadiah at verse 1. By the way, as I mentioned earlier, Obadiah uses poetic language and it is written in the form of a dirge. Do you know what a dirge is?

It is a lament for the dead, usually something sung or played at a funeral. You just get the feeling that this is not going to turn out well for the Edomites. Listen as I read it.

1 This is the vision that the Sovereign LORD revealed to Obadiah concerning the land of Edom.

We have heard a message from the LORD that an ambassador was sent to the nations to say,

"Get ready, everyone!

Let's assemble our armies and attack Edom!"

2 The LORD says to Edom,

“I will cut you down to size among the nations;

you will be greatly despised.

3 You have been deceived by your own pride because you live in a rock fortress and make your home high in the mountains.

‘Who can ever reach us way up here?’ you ask boastfully.

4 But even if you soar as high as eagles and build your nest among the stars, I will bring you crashing down,” says the LORD.

Okay, let’s take a breath here. Wow. God’s pretty upset. Do you get a sense of what the Edomites major flaw was from this text?

v. 3 You have been deceived by your own pride.

It is pride.

The 21 verses of Obadiah are actually divided into two halves. The first half is series of accusations made against the leaders of Edom specifically for their pride and self-sufficiency. They thought they were invincible. Why? It is because they lived in the rocks, literally a fortress in the rocks. In ancient times, height was seen as a significant military advantage. Edom’s capital Sela, (which literally means rock), as well as other cities such as Petra were located in nearly impenetrable high rock formations that could be reached only by a narrow canyon that was well defended.

You may have heard of Petra. The stone cut architecture is known as one of the new “Seven Wonders of the World. It gives you an idea of the geography of ancient Edom and why the Edomites were so smug and secure in their surroundings. This description of the height and rock was also a metaphor for how the Edomites felt they were above, superior to the Israelites. See the truth is that Edom was actually a small nation, in numbers anyway.

They had a meagre army to protect themselves and mostly rode the coattails of alliances with other more powerful nations like Babylon. They would arrive on the scene of a battle like Hyena’s, scavenging after most of the tough work had already been done and then scamper back up to the

safety and security of their rock lair, arrogantly taunting their enemies from their protected perch. Can you just picture it?

Our home in London backs on to a ravine and so we have wild turkeys that roam in our backyard. Occasionally, I will let our two dogs out and they will spot a turkey and chase it. The turkey will run at first but then it will go into flight mode. Turkeys can fly, do you know that? That is contrary to what I was taught by watching “WGRP in Cincinnati” in my youth. Some of you know what I am talking about. If not, go to “WGRP in Cincinnati, Turkey Giveaway” on Youtube. It’s classic television!

This turkey in our backyard would retreat to its nest in a tree nearby, squawky as if to taunt my dogs. It drives them nuts, they stand there looking up at the tree. I almost feel sorry for them. Almost. They get this defeated look on their faces because they know there is no chance they can ever get up there and get this pesky turkey.

That’s the Edomites. It was this pride that led them to not just sit idly by as the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem but also actually participate in the destruction. So God says through Obadiah that Edom will be brought down from their vaulted heights and be destroyed. As they have done to Israel, so it will be done to them. God is a protective parent. To be a child of God is to receive his love and protection. A dad never forgets who hurts his children.

In verses 10-14, Obadiah lists the accusations that God has against the Edomites.

-they committed violence against their close relatives the Israelites.

-they refused to help when they were being invaded

-they gloated when their relatives were taken into exile

-they rejoiced when the Israelites suffered misfortune

-they killed those who tried to escape

-they captured others and handed them back over to the Babylonians

The list goes on and on and God says to Edom, enough is enough. I have had it with your prideful, self-centred and evil ways. As you have done to Israel, your own flesh and blood, so shall be done to you.

Just when we think we are going to hear more about the doom of Edom the topic shifts in verse 15. If you have your bibles, circle this verse. This is the hinge verse that links the first half of Obadiah to the second half. Listen to it,

Verse 15

*“The day is near when I, the LORD,
will judge all godless nations!
As you have done to Israel,
so it will be done to you.
All your evil deeds
will fall back on your own heads.*

When Obadiah announces, the day is near, the day of the Lord is near, he takes his eyes off of just Edom and widens the focus to include all nations.

He says that all godless, prideful nations that act like Edom towards God’s people will face God’s justice in the same way.

They will fall from their prideful heights and come to ruin because God is a protective parent.

To be a child of God is to receive his love and protection.

In this small but important book of the bible, Obadiah sees Edom’s pride and fall as an example, or a parable if you will, of how God will one day confront the pride and violence of all nations with his justice. It’s the day of the Lord.

It is hardly a coincidence that in Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament, the word Edom is spelled with the exact same letters as the word that means Humanity- Adam. Edom can represent the hearts of all humanity when we turn our backs on God and let pride and self-sufficiency control our lives.

But here is the thing that I want you to grasp and it is the message of all of the prophets in the bible, not just Obadiah. God’s judgement is not his final word. There is always hope. There is always this anticipation that a new day is dawning.

God has restored his kingdom and it is expanding to include anyone who chooses to come to him. God’s love for his children is most specifically demonstrated in his provision for our redemption and salvation. He gave us Jesus! Just think about that for a moment and all that it means for our lives.

God’s love for his children is most specifically demonstrated in his provision for our redemption and salvation. Remember redemption and salvation are just longer words that mean that God saved us from the condition that we were in, lost in our sin, lost in our pride, lost in our self-sufficiency and he has provided a pathway for us to restored back into relationship with him as our heavenly Father.

The pathway is Jesus but we have to receive Jesus and that is a stumbling block to some. Even in the gospels we see that some people responded to Jesus’ invitation to follow him right away, no questions asked and others turned away.

Why? It’s pride.

Like the Edomites, our pride can get in the way. We think we know more about life and the ways of life, than the creator of life. How arrogant can we get? Really! And that is the dilemma that we are finding in our world today, people and the nations are turning away from God. Have you noticed?

No other region in the world has been exposed to the Biblical message and the influence of the church for such a prolonged and intensive way as the nations that make up Europe. At the same time, nowhere is the abandonment of the Christian faith and the institutional churches as wide-spread as in Europe. Go to Europe this summer and you can visit the most beautiful and ornate church buildings but apart from tourists, most of them sit empty.

In Canada, church attendance is decreasing by staggering numbers, church buildings are being shuttered by the thousands each year.

Our neighbours to the south, the US. Honestly, I don’t even know what to say. The words we hear some of the leaders speak sound right, by the actions just don’t seem to align much with what Jesus’ did.

It is interesting, that in the countries around the world that are the most affluent, Christianity seems

to be on the decrease and the countries that are the most impoverished such as those in Africa and South America, Christianity is on the rise. Why is that? Maybe it is because pride and self-sufficiency takes you further and further from Jesus.

Like the Edomites whose pride comes from a seemingly impenetrable rock fortress, what is that fortress for us today in North America? It is money? Things? What is it that we think will never fail us? It is people, a spouse? Drugs? Alcohol? A beautiful home in a gated community? A job? We have to be careful because when it takes the place of Jesus as our fortress, it can all come tumbling down.

For those who have nothing, those who are laid bare in places like Africa and South America, humility and dependency leads you to Jesus. They learn that nothing is certain apart from God. Sometimes you don't know Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you got!

God's love for his children is most specifically demonstrated in his provision for our redemption and salvation. He gave us Jesus. He is our fortress. Jesus is the antidote to our sin, our pride and our evil intentions. Jesus is the remedy for our family feuds and relationship strains. Dependence on Jesus is the only hope for the nations. Apart from him, nations erode and crumble. I think we are slowly witnessing that today.

To be a child of God is to receive his love and protection. As Christians, our reality and hope is in God's intervention on our behalf, to protect and save us from the enemy, whatever that may look like in our lives and give us a bright and eternal future.

The good news we have is that because of Jesus, the success of the enemy is only temporary in our world. The ultimate victory of God's people is assured through Him. To be a child of God is to receive his love and protection. God doesn't like anyone messing with his kids.

I trust that brings you hope today. No matter where the enemy may be lurking in your life, as you call on God, his love and protection will cover you.

I wasn't aware this picture was being taken until my daughter posted it on her Instagram account. It is Beau and me on the boat this past Monday. It was Beau's first boat ride. Notice he does have a floatation outfit on and don't worry I had a life jacket beside me. Although, I didn't know the picture was being taken, I do know exactly what I was thinking and saying to Beau at this very moment.

I was telling him how much I loved him and that he doesn't have to worry because no matter what, Papa will protect him. I won't let anything happen to him as I wrapped my arm tightly around him and nestled him in my lap. He was holding on to me but also peaking his head out to see what this new experience had to offer. When I saw this picture afterwards and contemplated the words of Obadiah this week, I just felt like it was a great illustration of how our heavenly Father, loves and protects us.

He doesn't hold us so tightly, that we can't move and experience what the world has to offer but he is our safe refuge. He is always there to remind us how much he loves us and he will keep us safe and protect us when the enemy encroaches, when we turn into him.

As we read Obadiah, we get a glimpse of what it means to be a child of God. Comforted by his unconditional love and protected from anything that seeks to harm us by his unflinching protection.

Will you come to God today and confess other fortresses you have been dependent on apart from him? And will you experience the love and the protection of your heavenly Father in a new and vibrant way?

Let's pray

Points to Ponder

Majoring on the Minors ~ Obadiah

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. In the spirit of the Dassler brothers' family feud, debate which running shoe you like best, Adidas or Puma.
2. Have you ever found yourself in the midst of a family disagreement? What were some of the circumstances that led to the animosity? Describe how things were resolved. If they were not resolved, what is the stumbling block?
3. In your experiences as a parent or a child, describe how a parent's role is to protect their children. List some situations when you have been protective of your child or your parent was protective of you.
4. Discuss the phrase, *To be a child of God is to receive his love and protection*. Give some examples of when you have felt God's love and protection. Has there ever been a time when you did not feel his love and protection? Share how you processed that time?
5. How can pride get in the way of your relationship with God? What are some of the "fortresses" that you have in your life that you can trust in more than God's provision and protection?
6. In what areas do you see Canada as a nation falling further away from its dependence on Jesus?

Prayer and Action Item

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed. Pray specifically that you will understand and experience the love and protection of your heavenly Father. If there is something you feel is hindering or threatening your faith journey, surrender it to Jesus today and accept his love and protection over your life.