

A Tale of Two Brothers
LaGrave Christian Reformed Church
March 1, 2020-PM Service
Obadiah 1
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In the early years of YouTube, a 56-second home video of family life captured the attention of people worldwide. Today it has been viewed more than 870 million times. In it two young British brothers, one a toddler and the other a baby, are sitting together. Suddenly the baby, Charlie, nips his brother's hand. At first the older brother laughs: "Ow, Charlie. Charlie bit me." Then Charlie chomps more forcefully. He holds on and doesn't let go. And the brother starts to wail and his tears start to flow. "That really hurts!" Charlie unclenches his jaws and releases the finger. But as he does the strangest thing happens. In little Charlie's face you see this glimpse of unbridled joy, this mischievous twinkle, and hear a giggle erupt in response to his brother's pain. "Charlie bit me," the brother says sheepishly. "That really hurt, Charlie, and it's still hurting." Little Charlie's devilish delight makes us laugh. It seems harmless enough. But we laugh at Charlie in part because in him we recognize something of our own hearts' struggle. We, too, experience an unbidden glee that bubbles up when we see someone else hurting, a tendency that surprises and convicts us.

Tiffany Watt Smith writes in her book *Shadenfreude: The Joy of Another's Misfortune*: "Sometimes it is easy to share our delight [at someone's failure], reposting memes of a disgraced politician's resignation speech. Far harder to acknowledge are those spasms of relief which accompany the bad news of our successful friends and relatives. They come involuntarily, these confusing bursts of pleasure, swirled through with shame. And they worry us...we fear that our lack of compassion says something terrible about us..." The times when we take quiet delight when our super-gifted brother is passed over for a promotion at work. The times when we experience a stab of joy that our child invites us, rather than our spouse, for a special parents' day at school. The times when we are happy that our meticulous, lawn-manicuring, car-washing, schedule-keeping neighbor accidentally backs into the garbage truck. This kind of devious delight at another's misfortune is a picture of the underlying sin that the prophet Obadiah confronts in the nation of Edom.

Trouble in the Text: Edom's escalation of schadenfreude into all-out war. I'm not sure I've ever heard a sermon on the book of Obadiah. Maybe some of you haven't either. As I studied these verses this week, I began to see why. Obadiah's message is nasty, brutish, and short. You have to look in a table of contents to find the right page. And it isn't abundantly clear how this word from God against Edom applies to us. To understand that we have to do some digging. So who are the players in these 21 verses?

Several people named Obadiah are in the Old Testament, and we can't definitively identify any of them with this prophet. Obadiah's name means "a servant of Yahweh," and we know little about who he is for sure, other than that he received the vision that he speaks of in this book. Like all true prophets, he comes speaking only what he has heard and seen from the Lord: God's scathing, vengeful rebuke of the nation of Edom, perhaps around the time that Babylon invaded Jerusalem.

The Edomites are descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother. Obadiah preaches more than a century after Jacob came into the world riding Esau's coattails, claiming his birthright and stealing his blessing. Yet for all Jacob's conniving, he has received the undeserved favor of

God's blessing, which can never be taken away. Despite the uneasy truce of the brothers of Genesis 32, the two nations continued to fight over the years.

By this time, the Edomites are mountain people. They "dwell in the clefts of the rocks," they "make their home on the heights," "make their nest among the stars" Obadiah says. They are tucked into cities carved in the sandstone cliffs southeast of Judah, in what is now the country of Jordan. Entrance to Edomite cities comes through narrow, winding passages between red cliffs towering up to 5000 feet above the surrounding plains. Their kingdom is easily defended. Edom is proud. It has resources. It seems invincible. Yet it is not beyond the reach of the God of the Universe, and he will take it to task. Like a parent whose righteous anger tumbles out to confront an erring child, God levels escalating accusations against wayward Edom's gloating over the invasion of his brother's gates: "You should not gloat over your brother in the day of his misfortune, nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction, nor boast so much in the day of their trouble. You should not march through the gates of my people in the day of their disaster, nor gloat over them in their calamity in the day of their disaster, nor seize their wealth in the day of their disaster. You should not wait at the crossroads to cut down their fugitives, nor hand over their survivors in the day of their trouble.

The Edomites' triumphant swaggering over brother Judah shows the ramifications of little Charlie's gleeful joy when it is full grown. First the Edomites "gloat over their brother," cheering on invading armies as their lookouts spot warriors marching for Jerusalem. Then, caught up in the excitement of seeing brother Judah on his heels, the Edomites mobilize and "march through the gates of my people" when Judah is face down in the dirt. But instead of offering a hand up, Edom kicks Judah in the ribs. He steals Judah blind, fills his pockets, and carries off as much as he can. If all that wasn't bad enough, Edom pursues Judah down the highways and byways, "waiting at the crossroads" to turn in the refugees and pick off survivors.

Edom's treachery is all the worse, God says, because he commits it against his own family! *Edom, Judah is your brother! And Edom, Israel is my people! When you come up against them, you come up against me. But just you wait: For the day of the LORD is near, for all nations. Verse 15 says "As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head." Esau, your day is coming. Edom, your time is near. Obadiah's word rings out in the ruined streets of Jerusalem. His sad song echoes in the ears of Jewish exiles on the long road to Babylon. It's news that Edom's time is just about up. It's bad news for Edom that brings strong encouragement to his own people. Because to Judah, it might seem for all the world that God has abandoned them. Where were Yahweh's everlasting promises to be with them, to be their God, to strengthen and uphold them? To his overwhelmed and discouraged people, justly sent to time out in Babylon for their persistent disobedience, God says this: *Your story isn't over. Whatever opposes My people will most certainly have its day in My courtroom. So Esau, your day is coming. And Edom, your time is near.**

Who or what is your Edom? What powers opposing God do you long to see have their day of justice in God's courtroom? Cancer, you shouldn't gloat so much over patients in the side effects of chemotherapy! Mental illness and addiction, you should not boast so much in the day of diagnosis! Secret sin, you shouldn't take pride in your power to discourage and destroy! Loneliness, you shouldn't rejoice in causing isolation! Violence, you should not take pride in the day of disaster! Food insecurity and homelessness, you shouldn't lie in wait at the crossroads to see whom you can pick off! Division and disorder, don't gloat--you won't have the last laugh! Persecution, you should not march through the gates of God's people! Do you know who you're dealing with? Because Edom, your day is coming. And Esau, your time is near.

In early January, *Christianity Today* reported that Boko Haram had continued its attacks against Christians in Nigeria, kidnapping Rev. Lawan Andimi in an effort to stop the effects of his ministry there. Residents who heard the raid was coming fled to the surrounding hills. But Rev. Andimi was taken. In his hostage video, he said, "By the grace of God, I will be together with my wife, my children, and my colleagues. [But] if the opportunity has not been granted, maybe it is the will of God. Be patient, don't cry, don't worry. But thank God for everything." His video was noted as a testimony even to his captors, different from other hostage videos. "[Andimi] appeared as one who has already conquered death, saying to his abductors and the rest of us that he is ready to die for his faith in Christ." Rev. Andimi died at the hands of his abductors later in January. His associates lamented the loss of his life and called upon the government for help, even as the church there continues praying and working for peaceable daily life. And to myself I wondered at his faith, what bone-deep conviction sustained and reassured Rev. Andimi of God's will in this set of terrifying circumstances, regardless of the outcome for him personally? The Holy Spirit gave Rev. Andimi profound trust that he was in God's hands. He knew that God's dealing with him, come what may, was entirely trustworthy, and he could trust God to deal justly with those who violently opposed him too. Esau, your day is coming. Edom, your time is near.

The kingdom of Edom was indeed conquered, likely by the Babylonians about 30 years after the sack of Jerusalem. Edom's day came, and its overthrow was complete. No recognizable Edomite nation exists today. But Obadiah's vision asserts that God's far-flung people will return, they will be regathered to populate His kingdom. The borders of that realm will expand in every direction in unforeseen ways. Verse 21 says: "Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau. And the kingdom will be the Lords." And that kingdom will be a kingdom for people of all nations.

It's no accident that Obadiah is sandwiched right before Jonah in our Bibles. Just in case God's people might sometime be tempted to exhibit pride of place as the special possession of God. Just in case they might labor under the misguided assumption that the Lord their God was not also God of all the earth... The next prophet in the Old Testament issues a call to repentance, not judgment, for Israel's enemies. That Jonah should be sent to turn the dreaded Assyrians to the Living God would snap God's people out of any tendency toward tribalism. Their kingdom, the Lord's kingdom, was to be a light for all nations. How will this be?

Beyond the lifetimes of Obadiah's first hearers, a King would come. A King who would suffer the mockery and rejection of his brothers, just as Judah suffered under Edom. A King whose friend and fellow Jew would treacherously turn Him over to His enemies for execution, just as Edom did to Judah. A King who would be stripped bare, for whose clothing lots would be cast, just as Edom did to Judah. This King would take up the burden of divine judgment and punishment for sin-not only the sins of Judah but also the sin of Edom! This King would bear the vengeance of God against sin so clearly described by Obadiah. Yet this King would NOT call down avenging angels. He would forego His rights in a life and death of sacrificial love. And He would teach His subjects to "love [their] enemies and do good to those who hate [them], to bless those who persecute them." This King goes by the name Jesus, because He saves people from their sins.

Every stab of devious joy we allow to swell, every inflated, self-sufficient thought we have, every time we look to benefit from another person's misfortune-gone. Avenged. Killed off. Defeated. Done. No longer written on your account. What a relief.

King Jesus invites us to be subjects of His realm, a realm that spreads in every direction. Every time the Spirit strengthens us to return good for evil; every time our trust in God wins out over our fear; every time forgiveness is sought and granted, the light of Christ's kingdom spreads a little farther, His realm shines a little brighter. Citizens of this kingdom come from far and wide, from every people and tribe and nation. They entrust themselves to their King: who is working even now to establish His kingdom of justice and righteousness in us, around us, and sometimes despite us. And His Kingdom can never be shaken. Come, Lord Jesus.

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