

November 21, 2021

“A Little Book with a Big Message”
Obadiah

FCF: Can we trust God when all others are against us?

PROPOSITION: (anchor) We need not fear
(magnet) for the LORD reigns.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Alliances are important. Whether the lunchroom, the boardroom, a political campaign, or a battlefield, we have to know who to trust, who we can count on, who will be there when others are not only not with us but actually positioned against us. Life can be hard. And we need allies.

Which raises a question. What about God? Is He there? I don't mean in terms of His existence but is He there? Is He with us? Have you ever wondered? Where is He when the waves of opposition come, when it seems like we're standing apart and alone against the world?

SCRIPTURE READING: **Obadiah**

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

I've been reading a book about Maine Game Wardens. One story told of a warden racing across a lake at night on a snowmobile only to find that the lake was not entirely frozen as he plunged into an area fed by a stream and so slow to freeze. The water may not have been frozen but his limbs were quick to disagree as he fought to swim, climb onto the ice, and crawl to safety.

Fear can make you freeze as well. And that's what had happened to Israel as we read this short book. Obadiah is often overlooked but it is truly a little book with a big message. Here's the backdrop. The nation of Israel had been taken into exile by the Babylonians. As is alluded to in vv.12-14, this was a time when foreign invaders entered the gates of the city, carried off their wealth, and ravaged the populace. It was a day of misfortune, ruin, calamity, disaster, and distress. It was a time of invasion, of refugees and displacement. But Babylon was not the only nation involved. The nation of Edom, located in the mountains to the southeast, was involved as well, piling on and taking advantage of the situation. And that is the focal cause of this vision.

Who then was its audience? Certainly Edom was being addressed. But the real audience was the people of Israel. For these events raised questions. “What will we do? Where will we go? Does the LORD care? Can He actually help us?” Terrible times raise difficult questions. Obadiah answers with great and needed reassurance. We need not fear for the LORD reigns.

How then do we see His reign displayed in this vision? In three ways. First, God will come to our defense. Second, He will keep His promises. And, third, He will bring a reversal.

I. HE WILL COME TO OUR DEFENSE

So first we see the LORD's reign in that He will come to His people's defense.

A) His Compassion for the Weak

Clearly, He has compassion for the weak. Consider what had transpired up to this point.

1. Covenantal discipline

The invasion and exile were part of a covenantal discipline, a judgment upon the people for their crass disobedience and spiritual adultery. They had been repeatedly warned. And so it came.

2. Heartless opportunism

But with that covenantal discipline we also see heartless opportunism. The nation of Edom took advantage of the situation, helping to capture their neighbors and even settling into their villages.

B) His Commitment to Justice

For this, the Day of the LORD was coming on those who had so mistreated His people.

1. The nation of Babylon

Though they had been an instrument in disciplining His people, the nation of Babylon would experience the LORD's just wrath. His sure sovereignty did not excuse their great immorality.

2. The nation of Edom

And the nation of Edom would feel this as well. The history between Edom and Israel went back to the days of Esau and Jacob. That is key to understanding the book of Obadiah. God chose Jacob over Esau. The older would serve the younger. We see the tension play out between them in the book of Genesis. And that went on for centuries. Esau/Edom grabbed for the land, the birthright. He refused to live by faith in the promises made to his brother, Jacob. And in doing so, he was striking at God's rule, His purposes. This is why we read (**READ Obadiah 10-11**).

So the LORD says, "Enough!" and then comes to the defense of His people.

Illustration:

What does this mean? It "breaks the cycle". It's what we mean when we say someone has acted in such a way as to bring an end to a repeating pattern of harmful negative behavior.

Application:

Having the assurance that the LORD will come to the defense of His people is the only thing that can break the cycle of vengeance, bring an end to literal or metaphorical blood feuds. Think with me. Wrong has been done to you. But you there's no one to bring justice. Which means you have to take it up yourself. Which then continues the cycle. But what if there was someone who would bring justice and we entrusted that justice to them? That breaks the cycle.

This is good news. We need not fear for the LORD reigns. He comes to our defense.

II. HE WILL KEEP HIS PROMISES

And He will also keep His promises. This is why we can know He comes to our defense.

A) To Send a Savior

To start, we have His promise to send a Savior. And this really is at the start of it all.

1. As needed

Immediately after the Fall recorded in Genesis 3, the LORD moves towards the need, towards this explosion of disintegration that has taken place - the great spiritual, physical, relational rifts.

2. As set forth

(**READ Genesis 3:15**) A promise is made to Adam. From there, over the centuries that promise of a Savior is further explained - who He will be, what He will do, where He will come from.

B) To Be Our God

The promise to send a Savior and to be our God. And that would be made clear as well.

1. Questions raised

Especially in times when there was cause to doubt. Think of what is going on here in Obadiah. Edom is strong. Israel is weak and that weakness seemed to say that their God was weak as well.

2. Answers given

But lest the nations think otherwise, the LORD's rule was reasserted (**READ Obadiah 3-4**). He is no bargain basement deity. He is the living God, His name upon Israel. They were His.

He will surely keep His promises. And that's what we see unfolding in these events.

Illustration:

His name is upon His people. Think of the call of Saul on the road to Damascus (**READ Acts 9:1-9**). "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." How can that be? Saul had only been going after Christians. He wasn't going after Jesus. So why would Jesus say this? It's because He identifies Himself with us. He so identifies with us that a strike upon us is a strike upon Him.

Application:

Do you see? We are precious in His sight. Perhaps some of us men can't digest the word "precious". Fine. We are supremely valuable in His sight - so much so Jesus would die to have us. That's not a metaphor, just some sappy language. It's real. And it's true of us corporately, as He looks at us collectively. And it's true of each of us individually, as He looks at us particularly.

Inestimable value. Do you know that of your fellow Christians? How would that express itself? And do you know it of yourself? You don't have to think too much of yourself to believe that. But you may be thinking too much of yourself to refuse to believe that. Such is His love.

This is good news. We need not fear for the LORD reigns. He has put His name on us.

III. HE WILL BRING A REVERSAL

He will come to our defense. He will keep His promises. And He will bring a reversal.

A) Immediate Horizon

That's one of the themes of this book. What looks to be one thing will be made another.

1. Deception

A reversal through deception. Edom was deceived by their arrogant pride. And, beyond that, this supposedly wise and discerning nation would also be deceived by their traitorous allies.

2. Retribution

A reversal through deception and retribution (**READ Obadiah 15-16**). They would get what was fair and appropriate, what they deserved. What they had done to others would be done to them.

3. Dispossession

A reversal through deception, retribution, and dispossession. This is what is meant by that list in vv.19-21 of the retaking of various places. God's people would reclaim what had been promised to them (**READ Obadiah 21**). And this points to something else, a greater kingdom to come.

B) Ultimate Horizon

Beyond the immediate horizon of reversal there is an event on a greater ultimate horizon.

1. The work of Christ

There was to be another great Day of the Lord and it would come upon Jesus. He would be gloated over and betrayed. He would take of the cup alluded to in v.16 - the cup of God's wrath.

2. The fruit of His work

This is the work of Christ. And the fruit of His work is hinted at here as well. Again, there is this reversal. Those brought low will be lifted high. As we have done, so it will be done to Him, brought down upon His head. The violent will be drawn near through the violence done to Him.

Again, there is this theme of reversal. And it points to this great reign of the LORD.

Illustration:

It's like the pattern of most any three-act drama. Think of *Star Wars* Episodes IV-VI. You have the introduction to the heroes, then a great crisis, and finally a resolution. It's a classic pattern you can see most anywhere. That resolution in act three brings the reversal to act two.

Application:

That's what we see happening here. Now what does it mean to embrace this? It means to be transformed by it. It means we should be a people of justice, mercy, and faithfulness. We should be known as those who stand for the defenseless, speak for the voiceless, lift up those cast down. We should be a people of reversal. Why? Because that's what Jesus has done for us.

And that motivation is the only thing that can sustain such labors. Good intentions and moral vibrations will not endure. We need the measureless motives and inexhaustible reasons of the gospel of Christ's kingdom. We need to be operating out of His purposes and His presence.

That's what drives us. We need not fear for the LORD reigns. He brings the reversal.

CONCLUSION:

To steal a phrase from Francis Schaeffer, knowing that the LORD reigns - regardless of impressions of your circumstances - how should we then live? Let me cast your imagination back to the 1988 film, *The Bear*. It's the story of an orphan bear cub who befriends an adult male grizzly as two trophy hunters pursue them through the wild. It was filmed almost entirely in Italy and Austria with live animals - including Bart the Bear, a trained 9-foot tall Kodiak bear - present there on location. The movie is especially memorable for its almost complete lack of dialogue and minimal score. It was nominated for and won numerous international film awards.

There's one scene in particular that stood out to me. It's towards the end. The cub is alone and attacked by a cougar, who corners the little bear near a stream. He tries to defend

himself against the cougar's attacks but is injured and so, in pain, growls as fiercely as he can. Surprisingly, the cougar retreats. It's only then that the camera pans back around the cub and the viewer can see what had actually frightened the cougar. It's the cub's giant friend, standing on his rear legs and bellowing. Which then leads to a happy and touching reunion of the two bears.

If you'll stay with me a moment longer, I want to turn the image just a bit. Consider what happens as we look to the LORD. It's not that we become the great bear. We remain the cub as we face the cougar. But now we know who is behind us. Which enables us to look to Him and lean upon Him when the world is against us. It empowers us to turn to Him and trust in Him when the questions and doubts begin to come. Friends, we need not fear. We need not give up, give in, fret, flee, compromise, or catastrophize. We need not fear. Why? The LORD reigns.

And we see that here in Obadiah, this little book with a big message.

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