

A TALE OF TWO BROTHERS Obadiah 1-21

Turn to the book of Obadiah. I'll give you just a little longer to find Obadiah than I'd give you for Genesis. Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament, tightly tucked between Amos and Jonah, and Obadiah is as obscure as any of the prophets. Anybody ever heard a sermon from Obadiah or memorized a verse out of Obadiah? Well, I couldn't raise my hand, either. Now, a sermon from Obadiah might not sound too exciting to you, but it certainly was to Janice. When I told her earlier this week that I was preaching from Obadiah this morning she got all excited and said, "Really, I don't believe it, you've got to be kidding." I thought, "Man, this is great. She hasn't been this fired up about one of my sermons in months". And I said, "No, I'm not kidding. What's the deal? Have you been reading out of Obadiah lately?" She said, "No, but we're having company over for dinner on Sunday and you're not going to believe what we're having." And by now I'm getting all excited myself. So I asked, "What are we having for dinner on Sunday?" And she said, "We're having jambalaya".

Next to a good wife, one of God's best earthly blessings to men is that of a good brother. Proverbs 17:17 says, "...a brother is born for adversity". God gave Moses a good brother whose name was Aaron. Peter and Andrew were brothers in the flesh and brothers in Christ, as were James and John. And down through the centuries God has often called brothers into the ministry. John and Charles Wesley were the founding fathers of Methodism. Over a half century ago God called two little poor Hispanic boys from Texas named Angel and Homer Martinez to be preachers of the gospel, and now they both are in the Hall of Faith established by the conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists. I have a pastor friend who is the co-pastor with his brother of a large Baptist church in Romania. And in a different occupation, this evening two brothers will be coaching against each other in the Super Bowl. But all of these brothers in the past and in the present have had the same mind and purpose, and all, including the Harbaughs I assume; have been a blessing to each other.

But sadly, this is not always the case with brothers. Obadiah speaks to us the tale of two brothers, Jacob and Esau, who were enemies, and whose lives took very different paths which led to vastly different destinations, not only for themselves but for all of their descendents. And in this message God has a warning for all who are on the same path as Esau. And that warning is "**Wake up** and **repent** before it's too late". And for those on the path of Jacob God's encouraging word is, "**Look up** and **rejoice**, for your salvation is guaranteed".

Obadiah's message begins with the condemnation of Edom, which was the nation that descended from Esau. But before we examine God's judgment upon Edom we would do well to review the life of Esau himself. Esau was the first son of

Isaac. And as the firstborn by Jewish law he was entitled to twice as much of his father's inheritance as his younger brother Jacob, and upon Isaac's death he would assume the role as head of the family. But Moses writes in Genesis 25:34 that Esau despised his birthright, because he valued it less than a bowl of stew. And some of you remember the story. Esau came in from hunting one day and was hungry, and Jacob told him that he would give him a big bowl of stew that he had prepared in exchange for his birthright. And without batting an eye Esau gave up his entire inheritance on the spot. But even though Esau was so wrong in doing what he did, he was still taken advantage of by his knifing brother Jacob. For Jacob's very name means "deceitful" (Genesis 25:26). And he knew exactly what he was doing when he stole his brother's birthright, and later on he and his mother collaborated for Jacob to steal Esau's blessing as well. And as a result Esau hated his brother and after his father died planned to kill him. And when Jacob discovered his brother's plot, he fled for his life.

Now, despite Jacob's shortcomings, he still had a heart that was tender toward God and he wanted to follow God. But this was not the case with Esau. Esau is an Old Testament prototype of everyone who lives for the lusts of their flesh. Esau's attitude was, "If it feels good I'm going to do it, and I'm doing it now". And I am not just referring to sexual passion. I'm talking about anything that the flesh desires – whether it is sex, or pleasure, or fortune or fame – anything that is earthly, anything that is of the world. John writes in 1 John 2:15, "Do not love the world or the things in the world..." And Jesus said, "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul (Matthew 16:26)? And the world is full of people just like Esau. They are in love with the things of the world to the disregard of their own souls.

But beloved, God has a strong warning for folks like these. The writer of Hebrews warns, "Look carefully....lest there be any fornicator or profane (godless) person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears." (Hebrews 12:15-17). When Esau realized how foolish he had been he went and with bitter tears begged Isaac to restore his birthright, but for all of his tears, Esau was still not sorry for his worldly, selfish attitude. He was only sorry that he lost his inheritance. Friends, that's the difference between true and false repentance. True repentance means you are broken hearted that you've sinned against God and desire to change your ways. False repentance means you're sorry that you got caught. And Esau was only sorry that he got caught in his lust and that he lost his inheritance. He never had a desire to change.

Well, after Isaac died the fulfillment of Esau's loss came to pass. Jacob had moved back home and he and Esau had presumably reconciled. But we read in Genesis 36:6 that Esau moved to an area south of the Dead Sea called Mt. Seir,

away from the presence of his brother. And he moved not because he wanted to, but because the country that he had lived in all of his life now belonged to Jacob, and there was not room enough for both of them. So Esau went to his mailbox one morning and pulled out an eviction notice, and it was from his little brother Jacob. And he seethed with anger, hating him as much as he ever did, but there was nothing he could do about it but leave. So that is the sad saga of Esau. First born son, lost his birthright through foolishness, and forced to move from his homeland and die in a foreign land. And all because of his own lusts.

But what does Esau's sad life story have to do with his descendents, the Edomites? Everything. For you see, it appears from scripture that Esau never stopped hating Jacob. We know this by what God says about the Edomites. Speaking of the Edomites, Ezekiel 35:5 says, "...you have had an ancient hatred, and have shed the blood of the children of Israel by the power of the sword at the time of their calamity, when their iniquity came to an end..." Ezekiel is writing at the time of the Exile, and says that Edom's hatred for Israel is ancient, it has been there for years and years. And down through history we read from scripture and from secular writings as well how the Edomites mistreated and shed the blood of God's chosen people.

The first incident occurs soon after Israel became a nation. They are wandering in the wilderness and come to Edom and request that they be allowed to pass through without touching any of their vineyards or crops, not so much as drawing water from their wells. Moses addresses them as brothers, but the king of Edom says no to his brothers, and that if they dare pass through Edom that his army will come against them with the sword (Numbers 20:18). And they came out in battle ranks to show Israel that they meant what they said. Now, this was over 400 years after Esau and Jacob parted ways, but Esau's unforgiveness still lingers.

But that was just the beginning of Edom's sin against God's people. Look at verses 10-11. Obadiah tells Edom that God will judge them for their violence toward Judah. And this violence could have taken place on more than one occasion in Judah's history. But one of those times was certainly when Judah was taken into captivity by the Babylonians in 586 BC. When Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem, Psalm 137:7 says that the Edomites were standing by crying out, "Raze it, raze it, to the very foundations!"

Most of you know of the dynasty of the Herods during New Testament times. It was Herod the Great that tried to kill the infant Jesus by slaughtering all the baby boys under two years old. It was Herod Antipas who murdered John the Baptist. It was Herod Agrippa I who killed James the brother of Jesus and tried to kill Simon Peter. And all these men were Edomites, and Satan used them all to persecute God's people, the descendents of Jacob. And the historian Josephus writes that when the Romans stormed Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and ravaged the city, the Edomites joined with them, massacring thousands of Jews and torturing others. And beloved,

this was over 1800 years after Jacob and Esau had their split up. But still Esau's descendents had not yet forgiven Jacob, and were still seeking vengeance.

Friend, may I say to you that it is a dangerous thing to harbor bitterness and unforgiveness in your heart. Jesus said in Matthew 5:15, "But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses". And that means that you can live your entire Christian life out of fellowship with God, cut off from His peace and his power upon your life. But not only will unforgiveness destroy you, but you could be guilty of passing down your sin upon no telling how many generations of loved ones who'll come behind you. But on the other hand, when you live your life committed to following Jesus Christ, you have the same possibility of passing the torch of your faith down to generation after generation for the glory of God.

Now, for the next few minutes I want us to briefly see the cost of Esau's sin upon the Edomites. Other than unforgiveness and the persecution of God's people, how else did they sin against God? And what was God's judgment upon them? Look back at verse 3. "The pride of your heart has deceived you". Edom was filled with pride. You see, there was a part of Edom that was practically impossible for any enemy to penetrate. It was the capital city of Petra. Petra means "rock", and it is easy to see how it got its name. It was a secluded fortress accessible only through a deep gorge, with high mountain walls all around. It is said that Petra was so treacherous to approach that 12 men could defend it against an entire army. And oh, how proud were the Edomites because of their supposed superiority against any would-be attacker. It is interesting that four times in this short book God refers to them as the "mountains of Esau". It is as if this is how they liked to think of themselves – high and lifted up above anyone around. Listen to what they proclaim in the latter part of verse 3, "Who will bring me down to the ground?" And the answer in their minds was, nobody.

Friends, there is not a sin under heaven that God detests more than pride. Proverbs 6:16: "These six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him". And the first one on the list is a proud look. Charles Spurgeon said, "It is a wild, strange thing to think that a man should be proud when he has nothing to be proud of. A living, animated lump of clay – defiled and filthy, a living hell – and yet proud." Now, some would say that Spurgeon is coming down pretty hard on the human race. Are we all not more than a defiled and filthy lump of clay? Doesn't being created in God's image count for something? It surely does! We are exalted above all creation because we have the capacity to know God, to know right from wrong, and to live forever and ever. But in our fallen, sinful, nature we all have thanks to Adam and Eve, until we trust Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord we are under the curse of death and hell. Deuteronomy 27:26 says, "Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them..." (NASB). Isaiah says that we are all as an unclean thing, and all of our righteousness is as filthy rags, and that we all do fade

as a leaf (Isaiah 64:6). James says that our lives are as a vapor (James 4:14). Paul said, "I am what I am by the grace of God..." (1 Corinthians 15:10).

Turn, please, to 1 Corinthians 4:7. In this verse Paul blows any argument for pride clean out of the water with three questions. Question #1: "For who makes you differ from another?" In other words, who made you the way you are, with all of your gifts and abilities? Answer: God. Next question: "And what do you have that you did not receive?" In other words, **what did you** do to merit God's blessing you with all of your intellect or personality or beauty? Answer: Nothing. Everything you are that might seem attractive to you or the world is purely by God's grace. So God asks the final question, "Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?" In other words, if everything that you are is a gracious gift from God, **what are you bragging about?** You see, beloved, that's why God hates pride so much. Pride takes all the credit for what God has done.

It was pride that caused Lucifer to be kicked out of Heaven before the world was ever created. It was pride that caused Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, wanting to be as smart as God. It was pride that caused the nations to be scattered to the ends of the earth at the tower of Babel. It was pride that caused Nebuchadnezzar to eat grass like oxen and caused his hair to grow like eagles feathers and his nails to grow like birds' claws (Daniel 4:33). It was pride that caused the rich fool to say, "I've got too much stuff to hold in my barns, so I'll just tear them down and build bigger ones, kick back and say to my soul, eat drink, and be merry". It was pride that caused the disciples to argue over which one of them was the greatest. It was pride that caused Herod to accept the praises of men as if he were God and to be struck dead and be eaten by worms (Acts 12:20-23). And it will be pride that will cause the antichrist to sit in the temple at Jerusalem in the end times and demand to be worshipped as God (2 Thessalonians 2:4). Do you see that from even before Genesis 1:1, all the way through the book of Revelation, pride is the great slayer of mankind?

Beloved, every day the sun arises, every one of us who is saved should get down on our knees, humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God and thank Him for saving such a sorry, wretched sinner as I. Every day we should praise Him before men and angels for every good thing that is in our lives, and everything we consider not to be good. For Paul says, "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you". And every day we should cry out, "Lord, make me poor in spirit", make me humble. And watch this. The moment you think that you are winning the battle with pride, then get back on your knees and start praying some more! Because that is the devil telling you to be proud that you are becoming so humble.

Well, the Edomites were proud of their invincibility against would-be attackers. They were convinced that there was not a nation in the world that could take them down. But somehow they forgot to factor God into that equation. Look what God says to them in verse 4. Now look again at verses 8-9. God told Edom that one day

they would be slaughtered. Now, this does not mean that there would be genocide of the entire Edomite population, but that they would be extinguished as a nation. And that is exactly what God did. Actually the Edomite extinction began around 300 A.D. when a group of Arabs conquered their hallowed capital city Petra. And other groups continued to harass them in later years as well, until they were completely destroyed by the Romans around 70 A.D. And no one knows a spot on earth where an Edomite might be living to this day.

So that's the story of the Edomites, a people of hatred and pride. A people who followed in the footsteps of their father Esau, a man the Bible says was ungodly. And a people that God exterminated because of their sin. But beloved, God would not have Obadiah to simply give us a history lesson today. He has a word for us just as surely as He did the Edomites. And that word is in verse 15. Does this verse ring a bell in your mind about a similar New Testament verse? How about this one from Galatians? Paul said in Galatians 6:7-8, "Do not be deceived. God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows that he will also reap. For he who sows to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption. But he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life".

But we cannot conclude this morning without a brief look at what Obadiah says about Esau's brother, Jacob, or actually about Jacob's descendents, God's chosen people Israel. Look at verses 17-18 Now, Mt. Zion in verse 17 speaks of Israel. And these verses are a prediction of the end times, when Jesus comes again. And when He comes He will bless Mt. Zion in four distinct ways.

1. He will save them (verse 17)
2. He will sanctify them (verse 17)
3. He will satisfy them (verse 17)
4. He will strengthen them (verse 18)

The question I have for you today is, what kind of seed are you sowing? Are you sowing to the flesh, or are you sowing to the Spirit? To sow to the flesh, like Esau, means eternal death. To sow to the Spirit, like Jacob, means everlasting life.