

(3) A day to remember and a day to forget

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[0 : 00] This morning's reading is continuing our study in Obadiah, reading from verse 10 to verse 16, and it can be found on page 933.

Because of the violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever. On the day that you stood aloof, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them.

But do not gloat over the day of your brother in the day of his misfortune. Do not rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their ruin. Do not boast in the day of distress.

Do not enter the gate of my people in the day of their calamity. Do not gloat over his disaster in the day of his calamity. Do not loot his wealth in the day of his calamity.

Do not stand at the crossroads to cut off his fugitives. Do not hand over his survivors in the day of distress. For the day of the Lord is near upon all the nations.

[1 : 21] As you have done, it shall be done to you. Your deeds shall return on your own head. For as you have drunk from my holy mountain, so all the nations shall drink continually.

They shall drink and swallow, and shall be as though they had never been. Thanks Dave for reading those verses to us.

If you're joining us here for the first time in the series, this is the third of four talks looking at Obadiah's little prophecy. It's a relatively unknown part of the Bible, but a really important one, because it shows us the goodness of God's judgment.

The prophecy itself is focused on God's judgment of Eden, who we've seen and said have committed terrible persecution against God's people.

But what is unique about Obadiah in Scripture is to see where this persecution is coming from. One of the significant things we'll learn in today's passage is that Eden was actually related to God's people in the past.

[2 : 40] In other words, the persecution that God's people were facing at this time was actually from those who had one time been related to them.

Who had seen first-hand the privileges and blessings of God. Now I think this is especially pertinent for us today, given the persecution and pressures we currently face as a church living in a post-Christian nation.

By post-Christian, I mean a nation which in the past has been privileged to enjoy God's blessings. As it lived by biblical principles. But now rejecting those principles and turning against those who still want to follow Christ, follow the Bible's teachings.

So 200 years ago in England we had a justice system based on the teaching of the Bible. A scientific establishment based on the truth that there is a God, a God of order.

He's made this world. It can be investigated. An education system with God at the centre. But we look around us today and we may be surprised to find God in any of these.

[4 : 00] In fact you well might be mocked at or laughed at if you mention his name. You can even go into some churches today and find no mention of Jesus.

Or no mention of a relationship with him. So this is what is meant by post-Christian. What I mean by post-Christian is the nation we live in today. And as a result of this, well we face pressures for being Christians.

For being faithful Christians. The pressures on us and on the church are mounting. I'm sure you feel it every day, every week. Don't talk about your faith in public. We don't want to hear your Christian opinion at work.

Don't share your faith with others if you know better. Don't you dare say Jesus is the only way to God. And don't be saying that certain sexual practices are wrong.

Or if you do, there might be repercussions. At this stage it might just be loss of face or loss of friends or loss of jobs.

[5 : 04] Give it ten years. It might be loss of freedom. In jail or worse. So we all feel this mounting pressure on us. This persecution as Christians living in this nation.

But how are we to react to this pressure? What's God think about it? What's he going to do about it? Well, Obadiah verses 10 to 16 tell us.

Let's take a look now. Because from these verses, God wants us to remember two things. As we see the sort of persecution and pressure his people were facing from Edom at the time.

I put them on the back of the sheath. Actually, I've changed the first one slightly. Two things. First, remember God is appalled at the evil acts of brother Edom. Remember God is appalled at the evil acts of brother Edom.

And secondly, remember God will one day perfectly judge all evil. First then, God is appalled at the evil acts of brother Edom.

[6 : 06] As we see, God doesn't turn a blind eye to the persecution of his people. Let's look at verse 10 together. Because of the violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you and you shall be cut off forever.

God here is addressing Edom, telling them that judgment is coming upon them for their violence against God's people. And notice the words God uses here in the rebuke.

He describes God's people, those whom Edom is persecuting, as your brother Jacob. He reverts back to using the personal name Jacob. As a wake-up call, as if to say, look, don't you remember who these people are, Edom?

This is your brother you are persecuting. Not that God isn't appalled at any acts of violence against the church. He is, but there's something even more shocking, more grotesque, more appalling about Edom's violent persecution.

Because it's towards their brother. And this is further underlined in verse 11. By way of historical background, the day here, referred to here, is the day in 587 BC, which from 2 Kings 24 we know was when the Babylonians besieged Jerusalem.

[7 : 40] They carried off all their treasures and looted it and took the people of God into captivity. And on this fateful day, the Edomites didn't help their brothers.

They stood aloof. They didn't even care. And God's damning verdict of Edom's behaviour is clearly, you were like one of them. Like the enemy.

What an outrage. That a nation which once grew up within the family of God, that experienced these same privileges and blessings, would now turn and persecute them.

You've rejected your privileges. You're no longer a brother. You're acting like an enemy. You've become an enemy. I'm going to treat you like an enemy. You will be cut off forever. Now we must remember that this has spoken first and foremost to God's people, even though it's concerning Edom.

And this would have been an encouragement for them to hear God speak like this. That God is appalled at what is happening to them.

[8 : 46] That God doesn't turn a blind eye to persecution. That God will step in and deal with those who are persecuting his people, his church. Because the God of Obadiah is the God of today.

We can be encouraged that God is similarly appalled when we face the sort of persecutions or pressures we're talking about at the start. He does care about them. And the fact that God does care is really brought alive to us in verses 12 to 14.

Just flick over the page. As God relives the horror of the persecution in all its shocking detail. What is interesting is that God switches here to the present tense.

Even though the events already happened. It's as if God wants to reassure his people. He was there with them as it happened. He saw it all. He was experiencing it.

Let me read from verse 12. But do not gloat over the day of your brother. In the day of his misfortune. Do not rejoice over the people of Judah.

[9 : 53] In the day of their rearing. Do not boast in the day of distress. Do not enter the gate of my people. In the day of their calamity. Do not gloat over his disaster. In the day of his calamity.

Do not loot his wealth. In the day of his calamity. Do not stand at the crossroads to cut off his fugitives. Do not hand over his survivors in the day of distress.

It makes for horrific reading. On the one hand, we experience a fresh Eden's sins as they spiral into ever increasing degrees of wickedness throughout the day.

And yet on the other hand, you hear God's increasing outrage with every do not. Do not gloat. Do not rejoice. Do not boast. You can almost hear God's voice getting louder with each do not.

Do not enter. Do not loot. Do not cut off. Don't do this, Eden. God is disgusted at the persecution Eden is committing. He is right there with them. Admits it. And right in the middle of those verses, you have that reassuring phrase.

[10:55] Do not enter the gate of my people. No matter the persecution. No matter how bad it gets. God's people remain his people. He stands right beside them in the midst of their suffering.

Never forsaking them. Never leaving them. He never will. Now, our nation is not as bad as the nation of Eden.

We are not facing the sort of persecution God's people were facing then. Not yet, anyway. Because as Eden's sins soon spiralled out of control, from gloating and rejoicing to looting, cutting off, and worse.

Well, it could be that this country does, under the grace of God, or it's not grace of God, it's not the sovereignty of God. This country may well spiral out of control in its persecution of Christians.

Which is why we must remember these verses. No matter how bad things might get in this country for Christians, God is still with us. We are still his people.

[12:00] He does care, and he will deal with those persecutors today, just like he did Eden then. And even amongst the pressures today, we must remember it.

Admits the growing number of legislative bills, wanting to squash and silence us as a church. The sexual orientation regulations, which have just been passed.

The Human Embryo Act, which is forthcoming. Admits the media's gloating and rejoicing in any ruin and distress of Christians. Admits the battle within the Church of England. Liberals wanting to kick evangelicals out, loot the buildings.

Admits the real threat from certain Muslims who want to cut off Christians permanently. Admits nominal Christianity, which thinks we're crazy for taking the Bible seriously, taking prayer seriously, taking Jesus' wrath-bearing death seriously.

Or just admits the daily pressures we all face from colleagues or neighbours or friends. You laugh inside at us following Jesus. And despite even the Christian upbringing they have received.

[13:09] Whenever we face persecution from those who have at one time had connections with the Church, the privileges, the blessings of that, but have now turned against it, to the extent of even persecuting God's people.

God says, well look, remember the fate of Eden. Remember that God is appalled at the evil acts of Eden. And He will deal with it.

Now how do we know this? How can we be certain that God will deal with these evil acts? Well, let's turn now to verses 15 to 16.

Because in these next two verses, God tells His people and reassures them that He will one day perfectly judge all evil. Take a look at verse 15.

For the day of the Lord is near upon all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you. Your deeds shall return on your own head, for as you have drunk on my holy mountain, so all the nations shall drink continually.

[14:25] They shall drink and swallow, and shall be as though they had never been. Here God gives Obadiah a vision of the future. He sees a day when all wrongs will be paid for.

This so-called day of the Lord, which speaks not just of the historical judgment that befell Edom, but also that final day of judgment that will befall all people at the end of the world.

And so as God's people hear of this judgment, this judgment coming on all nations, which of course includes Edom, well so they are assured. Edom will be judged.

God will certainly deal with the persecution they are currently facing. I've put a quote on the service sheet there from Acts 17, which shows us how the certainty of this promise applies to us today.

Acts 17, verse 31, God has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, Jesus Christ.

[15:34] And of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. God has raised Jesus from the dead, exalted him to the highest place, he's now king and judge of the universe.

This is proof that one day Jesus will return to judge the world, the living and the dead. And so because of the resurrection of Jesus, we today can be certain of God's future judgment. Which again is assurance. That the persecution we face as Christians, even if it got so bad as the persecutions that the Edomites committed, in verses 10 to 14, they will be dealt with by God. One day the seeming power and danger threat of Islam will be destroyed. One day the stupidity of nominal Christianity will be judged.

One day the cancer of liberalism will be cut off from the church. And if this nation continues in the post-Christian path it is taking, don't be surprised if one day God brings it down and judges it just like Edom.

[16:51] If not in the near future, then certainly on the final judgment day. Because all those who persistently, unrepentantly, persecute God's people in the manner of Edom will certainly be destroyed.

Remember, one day God will judge all evil. In fact, because of the certainty of God's judgment, we can be certain of everything we have seen so far in the prophecy about the goodness of God's judgment.

In verses 1 to 4, we saw that God's judgment meant that justice will be done. If judgment was certain, justice would be certain. Last week in verses 5 to 9, we saw that God's judgment would beckon in a brand new world with no suffering, no evil, no tears, when all our enemies will be destroyed.

If judgment were certain, our glorious future would be certain. Well, judgment is certain. The day of the Lord is near upon all the nations.

Jesus is judge, Jesus will judge. And Jesus will do so perfectly. Verse 15 again.

[18:04] As you have done, it shall be done to you. Your deed shall return on your own head. On that day, God will perfectly judge all evil.

It's because God is the one doing it. We can be sure that every deed, every, sorry, evil deed, every wicked act, every persecution, it will receive its appropriate punishment.

And of course, because it is God who will certainly and perfectly repay evil on that day, well, we don't need to try and repay it ourselves now. If you're anything like me, when you get hit with some, I don't know, some insult or torrid of abuse, my first reaction is when I snap back at it.

If injustices were to come on those closest to you, the temptation is to take matters into our own hands. And the worse the persecution becomes, well, the more we want to retaliate and are tempted to seek our own justice.

But this verse is a great reminder that all sin, all persecution will be perfected. perfectly judged by God. He will deal with it. Which means we don't need to.

[19:25] Flick forward with me to Romans 12 on page 1142. Where the Apostle Paul applies exactly this point to us as Christians, he shows how the future certainty of God's perfect judgment affects the way we relate today, particularly to our enemies.

So Romans 12 verses 17 to 21. Verse 17.

Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honourable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God. For it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.

To the contrary, if your enemy's hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him something to drink. For by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

[20:47] Couldn't be any clearer, could it? Leave it to the wrath of God. Leave all the persecutions you are facing to his day, his final day of judgment.

Never avenge yourselves, for I will repay, says the Lord. How we need to hear this and believe this today. We've already said that persecution could get worse in this country.

How do we react? It's tempting to want to fight back in vengeful anger, or just to moan, complain, and hide away. Even now, we've said there's persecutions we do currently face.

It's just got to keep nibbling away at us day in, day out. How are we to react? It could be that this week or this past week, standing up for Jesus will mean some mocking, some alienation, some raised eyebrows, some shame, some misery, some distress on you or your family, perhaps worse.

We need to remember that God will one day perfectly judge all evil. If we are tempted to retaliate, take revenge, remember God will repay.

[21 : 59] We don't need to moan at the injustice of it or complain, try and hide ourselves from it, because God will one day perfectly judge all evil. And taking this one step further, the certainty of God's future judgment not only motivates us not to retaliate, not to take revenge, it also frees us up to love those who persecute us, to plea for God's forgiveness, because we know how terrible God's judgment will be on that day.

If your enemy is hungry, says Paul, we'll feed him. If he's thirsty, give him something to drink. Don't be overcome by evil, overcome evil with good. I mentioned in the first talk, I'm not sure if you can remember, three Christian men in Turkey who were murdered in April for following Jesus Christ. It wasn't until this week that I was sent a report of what actually happened on that day. I printed it out here, I'll leave it on the bookstore if you want to read it. It's quite a horrible reading actually, I should warn you, there's some horrific torture scenes and persecution that they had to face, and I won't go into detail with that now.

Suffice to say that ten young men living out there, supposed love for Allah and hatred of infidels, took guns, bread knives, ropes and towels and brutally murdered these three Christians, which is sickening enough in and of itself, except later on in an official televised response, the interior minister of Turkey smirked as he spoke about these attacks on the Christians, gloating, rejoicing, boasting over the death of these Christians.

But perhaps most amazing of all was the response of one of the wives of the dead husbands. Let me read it to you.

[24 : 04] In an act that hit front pages in the largest newspapers in Turkey, Susan Tillman in a television interview expressed her forgiveness. She did not want revenge, she told reporters.

I do not want revenge, I only ask that God forgive them, for they know not what they do. And as a result of this comment by Susan Tillman, apparently lives have been changed, one columnist wrote of her comment, she said in one sentence, what 1,000 missionaries in 1,000 years could never do in Turkey.

It's amazing, isn't it? Here is someone who truly believed that God was appalled at the evil acts against her husband, that God would one day perfectly judge all evil, and yet with it she was able to say, well she did not want revenge, she could trust God for the future, rather she wanted to overcome evil with good, and plea for their forgiveness.

God is appalled at those who persecute his people, be comforted today, this week, as you go into the world, and be assured, because God will one day perfectly judge all evil.

Let's pray together. Father in heaven, we praise you that you are a holy God who is appalled at the persecution committed against your church.

[25 : 45] We praise you for the comfort it is to know that you don't turn a blind eye to it, that we are still your people amidst it, and that you will one day deal with it.

we thank you for that assurance that you will one day deal with all evil and persecution perfectly.

And so we ask you that you would help us to believe this and to trust you as the judge, not to retaliate now when we face persecution in this world, but rather to overcome evil with good.

Please empower us by your spirit to live like this today, this week. In Jesus' name, Amen.