

# Don't Laugh too Soon

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[ 0 : 00 ] I'm most of you aware that I've spent the last three weeks up in Katoomba with about 5,000 teenagers. Always a joyous experience. And we've been looking over those three weeks at the book of Revelation.

And what a joy it has been to revisit this book. It is pretty clear as you look at Revelation that Jesus is the victorious king.

He's the ruler, the Lord of all. He is the one who has all the power. He deserves all the praise, all the glory. He is the one who has victory over Satan. One of the things we'll remind of particularly that Satan cannot get to Jesus in any sense.

Demons cannot move an inch without his authority and without his word. He has everything in the palm of his hand and in control. It's been a great reminder to see that he is indeed the victorious king over all the universe of all that is.

Jesus. And this is the God that we've come to join together this morning. To worship. To honour. To praise.

[ 1 : 09 ] In humble submission. As Revelation 4 says, Jesus is the king.

The king. He is the king. But if he is, why is it that Christians are often sidelined and squeezed out in our world if Jesus is our king?

If he is God and king and ruler and Lord of all that is, then you'd expect Christians to reign triumphantly in society.

But they don't. You'd expect Christians to be the first ones consulted on their opinions on things. But they're not. You'd expect people would look to Christians for guidance on how to live well and how to raise their kids and how to shape society.

But they don't. Instead, Christians are pushed to the edge in society and mocked. In some countries, they are killed, certainly financially squeezed. If you're a Christian and you express a Christian opinion in the Sydney Morning Herald, you'll be mocked more than anyone else.

[ 2 : 29 ] If you go to university or TAFE and you stand up as a Christian, you'll have caught abuse on campus more than anyone else. The common voice is that the Christian church is a spent force.

That's the common voice of our society. I mean, one of the reasons for it is that, frankly, Satan can't get to Jesus.

And so he has a crack at his people instead. He can't get to Jesus, the victorious king. He's going to do everything in his power to make us a bunch of apathetic losers.

But I wonder how you feel when people say Christianity is a spent force. Maybe they're right. Maybe we are done for. Maybe being a follower of Jesus actually is old hat. That what we're doing here this morning is just not worth doing anymore.

But then again, people have said this sort of thing all along. It's not the first time that God and his people have been written off. In fact, I guess people have always done it.

[ 3 : 36 ] And we see it here in the book of Obadiah. People who have made exactly the same mistake of writing off God and his people just a little bit too soon. Obadiah is an unusual prophet because he tells us basically nothing about himself.

He just launches straight into it. And so what we've got to do is we've got to get some of what Vandal was referring to about understanding the bigger picture of the Old Testament. We've got to pull some of that pictures together to put the jigsaw puzzle pieces in so that we can understand a little bit of Obadiah.

So let's put some of those jigsaw puzzles in, those pieces in, and let's jump right to the beginning of Genesis where it tells us that we are living in a world that was good in the beginning. But it is now broken.

Broken because we have all decided to go it alone, ignore God the creator. We have chosen to live, to relate, and to rule his world our way without his word being our authority.

If we pick and choose what is right and wrong, we make the decisions, not God. And so basically the vast majority of the Old Testament is about the mess that we make when we try to live and rule and relate with our God at the center of our lives.

[ 4 : 45 ] But in the middle of that mess, God makes some very big promises. From Abraham, he says, he's going to become a special nation, a special people, and God's going to give these special people a land called the promised land.

And that from these people in this nation, from their blessing will spread to all of the world. But along with the promises come warnings.

God says, if you're going to be my special people and I'm going to give you special land, then you need to treat me like God. If you don't treat me like God, I will punish you.

And the major punishment you're going to receive is I'm going to throw you out of the land. I'm going to throw you away from my presence. And they didn't listen. They were eventually thrown out. A huge army from Babylon marches into Jerusalem in one occasion. And if you weren't slaughtered in the first attack, you were carted off into slavery into Babylon. Jerusalem, the capital, was reduced to rubble because the people of God chose to not be the people of God.

[ 5 : 47 ] God said, I will give you the land, but if you go off chasing idols, if you go off being unfaithful to me, then there will be consequences. And so the consequences came, and that's the way it was for 70 years.

Maybe you don't need to go and do that college course. I think I maybe just summed up the whole Old Testament just there. Let's pray and finish right now. We need to know this before we make any sense of Obadiah.

Because this prophecy that came from Obadiah was delivered after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. God had warned them that this was going to happen, and it did.

There are two main parts to this prophecy. Verses 1 to 16 are directed against Edom and the descendants of Esau, who lived next door to the southeast across the other side of the Dead Sea. And verses 17 to 21 focus on the vindication of Israel and the final establishment of God's kingdom on earth. The main point, I think, of the prophecy seems to be that God's oppressed people should take courage because he is still king.

[ 7 : 04 ] He is still master of the universe. He has not lost control. How do we know that? How do we know that he's the master of the universe?

Well, he could not proclaim this judgment upon Edom if he was not their God and king. So as God punished his people for obedience, what was Edom doing?

It's pretty simple, really. Edom had written off the people of God and written off their God. Edom had taken advantage of the situation. They had seen Israel's calamity, and they thought, Excellent opportunity to boot some people while they're down and to rub some salt into the wounds.

But they'd made a mistake. God had not finished yet. He isn't done for. His promises still stand. He is still king. And he still rules. So let's pick it up. Vision of Obadiah.

I want you to have your Bibles open. Page 895. If you're using a pew Bible. If you're not, then it's... Obadiah is between Amos and Jonah. So take it easy.

[ 8 : 09 ] You'll flick straight past it if you don't take it slowly. Between Amos and Jonah. So let's launch straight into it. Verse 1.

The vision of Obadiah. This is what God says about Edom. We've heard a message from the Lord. An envoy was sent to the nations to say, Rise up and let us go against her for battle.

Edom is about to be in some very serious trouble here. There is an old saying, Pride comes before a fall. And this is what's about to happen to Edom. See it there in verse 2.

See, I will make you small among the nations. You will be utterly despised. In spite of how it looks, God is going to reverse it all.

Israel looks like nothing at the moment. And Edom looks like the grand, you know, poobah of the world. But God said he's going to all change. Edom thought they were on top of the pile.

[ 9 : 05 ] That they were untouchable. They were in the big league. No one can bring them down from the big league. Oh, how many times over world history have we heard that sort of thing before? And God's response is there in verse 4.

Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down. They are suffering from the self-deception of pride.

When a person is in bondage to pride, they take whatever opportunity that they can to exalt themselves over others.

Nations, adults, even children all have one thing in common. Apart from the grace of God, apart from God working in us and changing us to be more like Jesus, we will derive our pleasure from other people's failures.

It's the heart of sin. It soothes our inadequacies and it magnifies our successes. And God says to not just to nations, but to adults and to children from there, I will bring you down.

[10:22] I will bring you down. And so from verses 5 to 9, there is a terrible picture of what the future holds for Edom. It's going to be so bad that they wish they had just simply been robbed and everything that they had was just done away with and they were just destitute.

Verse 5, If thieves came to you, if robbers of the night, oh, what a disaster awaits you. Would they not steal only as much as they wanted? If grape pickers came to you, would they not leave a few grapes?

You see, the point is that the land of Edom will have nothing left. It's heading for extinction. God is saying here that a thief would be more merciful than I will be for you.

You know, when, I've never heard a story when someone's been robbed, their house has been robbed or something like that, that they've come home and everything's gone. My underwear is gone.

My socks are gone. The curtains are gone. The knives and the forks are gone. Everything's gone. My goodness, they've flogged the dog kennel as well.

[11:26] Everything's gone. And the dog that's in it. It's like, I've never heard that story. They take the valuables and they leave the rest. And God says, I won't be like that for you, Edom.

I won't be like that. I will destroy everything. Down to verse 7. All your allies will force you to the border. Your friends will deceive and overpower you. Those who eat your bread will set a trap for you, but you will not detect it.

Even their friends are going to turn against them and stab them in the back and they won't even see it coming. And why is this going to happen? Why is Edom going to disappear from the map? The reason is there in verse 10 to 14.

And it all came down to what Edom was doing when Israel was facing God's punishment for their unfaithfulness. In these verses, Israel is called Jacob and God says to Edom, because of the violence against your brother Jacob, you will be covered in shame.

You will be destroyed forever. On that day, you stood aloof while strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem.

[12:30] You were like one of them. A terrible picture of how Edom took advantage of Israel's day of disaster. They looted with the looters.

They waited at the crossroads as Israelites attempted to escape from the Babylonians. The Edomites were there with their swords cutting down those who were trying to escape. And those they didn't cut down, they captured them, handed them back to the Babylonians.

Because, Edom has made a terrible mistake because it was the people of God. And even though they are being punished for their disobedience, they are still the people of God.

And so, God says to the Edomites in verse 15, the day of the Lord is near for all nations. All nations, including Edom, those nations around Edom, and every nation since, and every individual since, as you have done, so it will be done to you, your deeds will return upon your own head.

[13:36] And just like you drank and parted in your victory on my holy hill, so all the nations will drink continually. They will drink and drink and be as if they had never been.

They're going to face the consequences. Every nation that looks so strong will be destroyed. Amen? Don't give me any nukes you've got. Don't give me any troops you've got.

Don't give me what your economy's like. Every nation that looks so strong will be destroyed.

Obadiah says that God has far from finished with Israel. He is still God.

He still rules. He won't be defeated, nor his purposes thwarted. And that is how the shortest book of the Old Testament finishes up.

Edom has been gloating because Israel has done it tough. But the tables are about to be turned. Edom is going to end up as nothing and the kingdom of God will still flourish.

[14:33] There will be no survivors from the house of Esau. But, in verse 21, it says this, deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau and their kingdom will be the Lord's.

Obadiah, these words from Obadiah were fulfilled in a surprising way. He says that Edom will disappear and it has. I've got a world map sitting on my desk. There's no Edom on my world map anywhere.

It's gone. It was overtaken so many times that not even a trace of it exists anymore. Not even a trace of it exists anymore.

But there is another kingdom that has grown and flourished all over the world. Verse 21 says that it's God's kingdom. When Jesus came, his first public words were, the kingdom of God is at hand. The kingdom of God is at hand. The deliverer has come as Jesus walked up that hilly road to Jerusalem. People were there waving palm branches and laying them at his feet because they recognized the king and the deliverer has arrived at his city.

[15:50] But Jesus brought deliverance in an unexpected way. You see, the crown that Jesus wore was a crown with thorns in it. The deliverer was nailed to a cross as a criminal and he dies there as a substitute.

A perfect sacrifice for the sins of the people. Opening the way for us to be right for God. Right with God. Opening the way for us to be forgiven for all of our apathy and unfaithfulness.

And then he rose, he ascended, and he rules with God over a kingdom that has no borders. And frankly, it's a kingdom that doesn't look like much.

If you're not convinced by that, have a look around you. Just ordinary people have taken Jesus' claim to be king seriously.

It's a kingdom that people laugh at. Certainly plenty who have laughed at this king. People take delight in sidelining Christians as irrelevant people of the past and some of that is actually justified.

[17:01] Obadiah got it right when he said to the Edomites, you can laugh, guys. You can mock. But God's kingdom is going to stand forever. He's going to still be here when you're all gone.

When we're all gone. When all of our vain attempts to immortalize our lives have long been demolished. God's kingdom will still stand. Long after the great powers of this world have come and gone, his kingdom will still stand because he is the sovereign king of all that is.

Friends, can I just implore with you a moment and just bear with me for this one. We need to get this. We need to get this, right?

We need to get this day by day. God is not just our king here at St. Paul's or the king of the Christian church in Sydney or the world. He's the king of all the universe.

He's the God of all the universe. There may only just be a handful of us here and thousands out there at the moment at Chatswood, but he is their God.

[18:16] They may not know it, but he is their God. He is their king. He is their ruler. So brothers and sisters, we should not listen to the world that says that we are done for.

We should not believe the lie of Satan that it's all just too hard and so just shrink back in apathy and hang on tight and just hope to the end. We should never shrink back and say it's just too hard to hold the gospel out there.

But have we? When we see the task of bringing the kingdom of God to Chatswood, does it make you weary?

Does it make you downcast? Do you feel defeated? Do you feel like one of the Israelites there being cut down on the roadways and just think, oh look, hang on, look, I've got heaven so that's good.

You know, stuff the rest. As long as I know where I'm going, that's awesome. Do you feel defeated before you even begin?

[19:24] My understanding is we're three years into a vision here at St. Paul's and are you tired of it already? Are you tired of it?

Are you tired of it as if we were fighting a battle of flesh and blood? Let me remind you that Jesus is their king too. He is their God too.

The message of judgment that over the proclaimed was proclaimed to a king, to a people, to a nation that did not recognize their God and king and he called them to repent.

One of the ways that I think Christians reveal their weariness in the battle is what we tend to do is we, you know, batten up the windows and down the hatches and we put on bulletproof vests and, you know, we become a Christian subculture within the culture.

We hang on for dear life and, you know, we've got heaven and that's going to be fantastic and we're just going to hang on. We're just going to hang on and so we fight about the things that are in here as we batten down our hatches, we start fighting about the things within the building and other things like that.

[ 20 : 32 ] We do Christian stuff but in the end the world can go to hell in a handbasket. We become proudly self-righteous and confident. We are the people of God.

We've been forgiven. They haven't. And we enjoy totally relevancy and we get judged for the things that Israel was judged for.

Friends, that's why Israel was judged. That's why the Israelites were judged. They were told to be a blessing to all the earth. No, no, we've got sacrifices to make.

We've got songs to sing. We've got temples to build. We haven't got time to be a blessing to the world. I wonder what your response has been to the vision set by St. Paul's leaders a few years ago to see a thousand people giving glory to God in this place.

Do you think it's ambitious? Do you think it's ambitious? Do you think it's not possible? Do you think, I mean, seriously, come on. Do you think it's not possible?

[ 21 : 41 ] Maybe you've heard the mocking, the laugh, the ridicule, you've read the Sydney Morning Herald and you've written this world that is written of God and his people.

Maybe you've forgotten the word of God that clearly proclaims that he rules the world. He didn't just, he's not just the ruler of Eden back in history but he rules the world now.

He's the king now. He's the one who holds the stars in the sky now. He's the ruler of every life out there in Chatswood right now. They can't even draw a breath. They can't even raise a mocking hand or humble, sorry, or mumble a blasphemous curse under their breath without the God, the king, allowing them to give them that breath itself.

He is their king. He is their God. They might not know it but one day they will. one day calamity is coming and friends we're going to do everything we can to make sure that does not happen.

He is the God who turns the course of nations and history and lives as he pleases. No Christian should ever have the jitters that this world is careering out of control towards a meaningless end or that the task that God has given us to reach disciples of all nations is impossible.

[ 23 : 06 ] We must never forget that we're involved in a war and that means wartime lifestyle. It's pretty obvious if the Christians around you are getting killed as they are in many parts of this world it's pretty obvious they were involved in a fight.

I'm not so sure in Australia that we realise they're in a fight with all our creature comforts, our achievements, our laziness and our busyness that we realise that we're actually a war. A war that we are told to take the fight to.

A fight to them. Not, you know, let's all go and get gun licences and, you know, and buy some rifles. I mean, I'm a strong believer in that personally but, not that we're encouraged to do that.

But we fight with different weapons. We fight with different weapons, not the weapons that they use. We fight with different weapons. We are called, friends, to pray. We are called to proclaim Jesus and persevere in godliness.

That is the fight. We fight with prayer, with proclaiming Jesus and persevering in godliness. We must realise that the fight is on but Jesus is the victor. Satan prowls around like a lion wanting to devour us, wanting to distract us, to move us into apathy, to move us into ungodliness.

[ 24 : 24 ] Do we believe for a moment that God, that Jesus is victor and that for any moment, at any point in history, that if he so chooses he could but stamp his foot and the nations will bow to him in worship?

Do we actually believe it? Well therefore, do we pray for it? Not qualified prayers but do we pray for it?

Do we pray and preach and persevere in godliness and give and administer and plan and order our church life as if we believe it?

I'm expecting therefore that we'll have more people at four o'clock this afternoon prayer meeting than maybe we've had in the past. He is God. He is King.

He is Lord. He has the victory through the Lord Jesus Christ. He commands the winds and they obey. He places the stars in the sky and continues to hold them in the sky. He knows the depths of the universe.

[ 25 : 30 ] He speaks but a word and the world is formed and he is our God. He is our King. God is not finished with St. Paul's but he's also not finished with those 30,000 people out there in our neighbourhood.

So let's take up the weapons that he's given us. 2 Corinthians 10. We don't fight with the weapons of this world. We don't fight with the weapons of this world. Let's take up the weapons that he's given us of proclamation, of prayer, of perseverance and godliness and get into the battle. Jesus is the King of all of Chatswood. Amen.