

**Series: The Minor Prophets****Today: Obadiah: No One is Too Small To Make a Difference****Text: Obadiah****A Sermon preached by The Rev. Randolph T. Riggs, D.Min.****Sunday, July 13, 2008****First Presbyterian Church of Lancaster, PA**

This morning we are beginning a series of sermons that will take us through the balance of the summer. We have chosen to preach on a portion of the Bible which is often neglected: the Minor Prophets. Spanning over 300 years of biblical history, the Minor Prophets are minor not in significance of what they said. Their prophecy is no less important than prophets like Isaiah or Jeremiah. Minor refers to the length of the prophecy, not the importance of it. The Minor Prophets were simply less verbose than their counterparts, the Major Prophets. The length of their writing, not the weight of their words, is what we refer to as “minor.”

Most of us like to say we read our Bibles everyday, but the truth is that most of us read the parts of our Bibles which are familiar to us and make sense to us. So if you are like me, the last time I read many of the books we are going to explore this summer was sometime in Seminary and only then because it was required.

For those who may have forgotten, a prophet is not one who is a fortune teller. They don't read tea leaves or use crystal balls. They are deeply spiritual men and women who are set apart from their peers to speak for God. So a prophet is one who speaks for God, and a minor prophet is briefer in what they say than a major prophet. This morning we begin with the shortest of the 12 Minor Prophets, Obadiah.

In his introduction to Obadiah, Eugene Peterson reminds us: “...it takes the entire Bible to read any part of the Bible. Even the brief walk on appearance of Obadiah has

*its place. No one, whether in or out of the Bible is without significance.” (Message) We know very little about Obadiah. From these verses, we can see that he was a devout Jew from the Land of Judah. According to Peterson, it “was Obadiah’s assignment to give voice to God’s word of judgment against Edom.”*

You may not be familiar with the land of Edom unless you took the Bethel Bible Course or another in-depth bible study. Edom is the land of the descendents of Esau, the fraternal twin of Jacob. Both were the sons of Isaac who was a gift from God to their grandparents, Abraham and Sarah. There had been friction between the two brothers since birth which was heightened in their adolescent years when Jacob had stolen the birthright of his brother, Esau. As a result, the families never did get along. They fought wars against each other and considered each other enemies even though they came from the same family. Jacob was the patriarch of the land of Israel mostly west of the Jordan River, and Esau the patriarch of the land of Edom, the mountain country in the southeast.

The prophecy of Obadiah was prompted by the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. to the Babylonians. The residents of Edom relished the fact that their neighbors had been captured and carried away. They could have and should have done something to help their brothers and sisters at a time of need, but they did nothing. Instead, they stayed in the safety of their mountain homes and relished in the idea that their arch rivals were getting what they deserved. It is to their hardness of heart that Obadiah speaks. He reminds the Israelites to be careful for they will Reap What They Sow, and he also reminds them of the Faithfulness of God.

### **We Reap What we Sow**

The first fourteen verses is the oracle of Obadiah on the doom of Edom. He tells him there will be consequences for their callousness toward their neighbor Israel. Their unwillingness to help Israel in a time of need would come back to haunt them. In other words, we reap what we sow. The prophet understood that if we sow hatred, we will reap hatred. If we sow indifference, we will reap indifference. Likewise, if we sow compassion, we will reap compassion. If we sow concern, we will reap concern. If we sow inclusiveness, we will reap diversity.

A colleague of mine tells about his Uncle Greg who has cerebral palsy as well as being a quadriplegic. He was one of those guys who had a golden attitude, and he accepted his lot in life and ministered to a whole lot of people in his own way. He was able to get around quite well with an electric wheelchair, but his speech was difficult to understand.

A few years ago he attended a week at camp. A church member of my colleague served as a volunteer that week, and he was assigned to Greg. That meant that for four solid days, 24 hours a day, he did everything for Greg. John fed him every bite. He gave him every drink. He slept on a concrete floor on an air mattress beside Uncle Greg's bed. He took him to the bathroom, cleaned him up. He did everything for four days for Greg. John even got some of his friends together and took Uncle Greg out on the lake in a floatation device. He swam for the very first time in his life.

They have this tradition at camp that, on the very last day of camp; they get the servant volunteer up there next to the camper. They talk all about the camper, and they recap all the different things that they've done. Then they ask the campers one question:

"What was your favorite thing of the week?" The campers always say the same thing—swimming. The staff was a little concerned for Uncle Greg that they wouldn't be able to understand what he had to say because of his speech.

So John got up there, with Uncle Greg in his wheelchair, and he talked all about the different things that Greg had done that week. He said, "We've nicknamed him 'The Fish' because he loves to swim so much." He said, "Okay, Greg. It's your turn now." Then he turned to Greg and asked, "What was your favorite part of the entire week?"

Everybody could understand Uncle Greg, when he raised his hand, pointed back at John, and said, "You." John said, "Oh, there had to be something else. Was it the swimming? Was it the snack time?" Greg raised his hand up again and simply said, "You." (Source: Dave Stone, in his sermon "If Jesus Lived in My Neighborhood")

We reap what we sow. This was the warning of Obadiah to the Edomites. They had sown indifference and disharmony, and Obadiah warned them that it would come back to haunt them.

### **The Faithfulness of God**

At verse 15, Obadiah makes a marked shift in his prophecy. Until now he has been chastising the Edomites for their indifference and their callousness toward Israel at the fall of Jerusalem. Now he speaks a word of encouragement to the Israelites reminding them that God has not forgotten them; that even though they are exiles in a foreign land; even though they are captives to a foreign people; God will one day return them to the Land and keep the covenant with them to be their God people.

Needless to say, this has all sorts of political ramifications in the world of Middle Eastern politics in which we now live. The Edomites are the Arabs of our world today,

and the promise is to the Israelites, not the Edomites. However, the world of Obadiah knew nothing of politically drawn boundaries of 1947 and the arguments we are having over the land which rightfully belongs to the Arab people groups. There is word to the Israelites which challenges them to remember that when they receive the land which is promised them, they will treat the people who live on that land with justice and fairness. The Jewish state with which we deal today would do well to remember this portion of Obadiah's prophecy.

What the prophecy speaks of is the faithfulness of God. God will make good on the promises which God makes. God will remain faithful to God's people even when God's people are not faithful to Him.

It is that way with God always. When we believe that we have reached the darkest part of our lives, if we are faithful, we find that God is faithful. And there is a responsibility in that to live lives in thanksgiving and praise for the gift which we have received through the faithfulness of God in Jesus Christ.

Shortly after St. Augustine had finished his theological tome on the faithfulness of God, he was walking along the Mediterranean shore on the coast of North Africa when he chanced upon a boy who kept filling a bucket with seawater and pouring it into a large hole in the sand.

"Why are you doing that?" Augustine asked the boy.

"I'm pouring the Mediterranean Sea into the hole," the boy replied in all seriousness.

"My dear boy, what an impossible thing to try to do!" chided Augustine. "The sea is far too vast, and your hole is far too small."

Then as Augustine continued his walk, it dawned on him that in his efforts to write on the Trinity he was much like that boy: the subject was far too vast, and his mind was far too small! [Source: Stephen Seamands, *Ministry in the Image of God* (IVP, 2005), p. 101]

The final verse of Obadiah's prophecy is a reminder that God will have the final word, and that word shall be a word of hope and not despair. It is a theme which is repeated throughout the Bible as a word to those who may have lost hope. It is a word of soon, but not yet. A word reminding the Israelites that though they are in captivity, the day is coming when their position as rulers of the earth will be restored.

For any who have suffered the oppression of illness, economic uncertainty, political upheaval; it is a word which reminds us that the ultimate outcome belongs to God and all we can do is place ourselves in God's hands.

There are many of you who are going through a rough patch in your lives right now. The message of Obadiah can be for you. God is faithful, no matter what the circumstances are that you may find yourself in. This is the same message we preach about salvation through suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ every Easter. God is faithful, and our responsibility is to live in response to the faithfulness of God.

### **Conclusion**

We reap what we sow. We need to be careful what we sow for it will come back to be a blessing or a curse. God is faithful even when we have not been faithful to God. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord, Jesus Christ.