

A Vision of Redemption
Obadiah 1:15-21

Revelation 18
Revelation 19
Psalm 135: 5-14

Last time as we looked at the first half of this book, we talked a lot about wrath, punishment and the destruction of Edom, and how that correlates to the world today, as I tried to paint a picture, as the prophet Obadiah does here of the fearfulness of God's wrath upon sinners. The fearful and harsh reality that is set forth here in this little book, is that there is no redemption for some. Where the book of Ruth that we just wrapped up going through a few weeks ago as all about the redemption of the outsider, the justification of the undeserved one and a great picture of God's mercy and grace in providing salvation to the outcast, here in Obadiah we get the picture of the other side of God's nature, his anger and wrath poured out against the sinful outsider.

I see these 2 themes running side by side one another, both existing in God at the same time, absolute mercy, and absolute wrath. Ruth was given a second chance, she was not born a physical descendant of Abraham, she was of the offspring of Lot, a Moabite, a cursed one. Yet God in his mercy gave her redemption, through marriage she became a legal offspring of Abraham, an outsider was welcomed into the family. And as we talked about when we were going through that little book over those few weeks, this is a picture of each of us, once outsiders, alienated from the things of God, through the grace and mercy of God have been brought in, have been adopted, have been made his sons and daughters through the legal transaction of Christ's death, his blood shed for our sins, making atonement, paying the penalty, paying the price to free us from the wrath of God poured out among sinners.

That is not the picture that is painted here in Obadiah, this is a picture of wrath and destruction. The nation of Edom is no more, we have nothing but ruins and history telling us of these people. God cast them down, pulled them out of their high mountain, and brought them to destruction, using the nations, using even their own allies who turned against them, as it says in verse 7 "All the men in your confederacy shall force you to the border, The men at peace with you shall deceive you and prevail against you, those who eat your bread shall lay a trap for you. No one is aware of it." Even their closest friends and allies shall rally against them, and be a part of their utter destruction, just as they rallied against Judah, their own relatives since both the Edomites, and the Israelites were descendants of Issac, yet they were rivals as was prophesied, at war with one another, struggling against one another even before they were yet born.

It's a sort of poetic justice, that the same people whom they allied with, will be the same people who will be the instrument of their own destruction. Just as they turned against their own blood, so to will those who are closest to them deceive and betray them. But this morning we aren't focusing on judgment but rather the redemption that is promised so let us go ahead and read our passage for this morning, starting in verse 15 till the end of the chapter. (Read Obadiah 1:15-21) One of the major stand out things in this whole little book, is that this is a prophesy against Edom for their involvement in the captivity of Judah, yet this prophesy was not given to Edom, it was giving to the people of Judah who were held captive by Babylon. Last week I pointed out, that there was no chance for redemption for Edom, this was a final judgment of utter destruction. Yet, for Israel, there is a light, a shimmer of hope through their captivity, and a promise of a return.

Throughout the old testament as we read about God's dealing with Israel, we see a pattern of Israel's unfaithfulness, and God's faithfulness. Though God may punish her for her unfaithfulness, in the end he always relents and that punishment was used to bring her back, away from her rebellion and away from her sin. It is much like us, as human parents scolding our children for rebellious acts, it is done out of love, and out of concern for either the safety of the child, or the personal growth in learning life. So to it is with God, as he scolds his children, using hardships, trials, and difficulties to draw them back to himself. James calls them tests of faith, as we endure such thing in hope. The faithful will be strengthened, and the false faith will crumble. God is a God of promise, and he is a just and holy God who not only will keep those promises, but is unable to not keep them. Anything that God has promised is as sure to happen, as if it has already. This prophesied destruction of Edom, guaranteed to happen, there was no off ramp, no second chances here, but likewise so was the preservation of Israel, and the return of her from captivity.

Think about that for a second, the assurance of hope in Christ because God has promised a way of salvation. All that Israel had gone through, every trial, every temptation, every captivity God never once backed down on his promise, a remnant was always saved, she was never fully destroyed. This is a picture of believers throughout all of time, there have been, and I am sure there will be more times of persecution, of great trials and temptations, but God has always provided an out, God has always brought about a way for his people to continue. Look at this promise to the house of Jacob, to Israel as they are told this prophesy of the destruction of Edom. Verse 17. "But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance. And there shall be holiness the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions. The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame but the house of Esau shall be stubble." This is a promise of a return, and in the end the house of Jacob shall possess the lands of Esau. Fulfilling the birthright covenant with Issac, fulfilling the prophesy that the oldest shall serve the youngest, and giving us a picture of Christ, the holy one on Mount Zion who has brought us deliverance.

Again Israel's experience is a foreshadowing, a picture of the spiritual realities in Christ. The old testament accounts directly parallel much of the new testaments teaching on repentance and salvation. From Israel's escape from Egypt, being free from bondage and becoming a free people no longer slaves symbolizes God's power in freeing his people from the bondage of and slavery of sin, and making us a free people in Christ. The passover lamb whose blood was painted on the door posts to spare the Israelites from death is equated to Jesus, who is the true sacrificial lamb whose blood was shed to deliver us from the wrath of God, from death to life. During that moment of fleeing Egypt, Israel was backed into a corner with no way out, the armies which pursued her on one side, and the impassable river on the other, but God opened the way for her, God provided the avenue of her freedom and redemption by doing the impossible, he parted the Red Sea so that all his people could cross through, and he closed it upon the army of Egypt, who were not his promised people, who he did not provide a way through.

God destroyed the overwhelming forces that pursued them, God opened the way providing a escape. There was no human intervention or power here, it was solely God, and God alone who rescued his people, and at the same time, crushed his enemies. The way of salvation for Israel was through the impassable sea, they needed God to make it passable. So to it is with salvation, our salvation and justification before God is impossible for us, we needed God to send his Son to open the way and in doing so he simultaneously open the way for his people, and crushed Satan who has no power over us, for even if we fall into temptation, even if we yet sin God does not hold it to our account for the penalty has already been paid.

When Israel receives this prophesy, she is in captivity, has been taken by the Babylonians, have already had her cities destroyed yet the message from the Lord is, that she will take her lands back, she will inhabit the lands of her enemies. Though held captive, though slaves again, there is a message of redemption and regeneration. Again this parallels our own Christian faith, though we are yet still in this body of sin, though we are yet still sojourners in this world, we will one day take hold of that promised land, and will be free from the corruption of Satan. Just as Paul wrote to the Romans (8:31) "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? HE who did not spare his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who should bring a charge against the elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written; For your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. YET, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Though Israel was held captive, though her cities destroyed, through it all they were more than conquerors, for as we see in this last half of Obadiah, in God's time they will return, their enemies crushed and defeated, and their lands open to them. Verse 19 "The south shall possess the mountains of Esau, and the lowland shall possess philistia. They shall possess the fields of Ephraim the fields of Samaria. Benjamin shall possess Gilead. And the captives of this host of the children of Israel shall possess the land of the Canaanites as far as Zerephath. The captives of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad shall possess the cities of the south. Then saviors shall come to Mount Zion to judge the mountains of Esau, and the kingdom shall be the lords."

The message shifts at the end of this book, going from the judgment of Edom to a future hope, saviors shall come to mount Zion and will judge the mountains of Esau and the kingdom shall be the Lords. It would seem that there are 3 main views on who these saviors mentioned are. One view is a literal historical view, that these saviors mentioned here are historical figures, like the Judges, the Maccabees, who were a family of Jewish warriors who led a successful revolt against the oppressive Syrian-Greek empire at the end of the 2nd century BC. Their victory reclaimed and rededicated the defiled temple in Jerusalem, and is still celebrated today every year during the festival of Hanukkah. These were historical, and literal figures who restored Jerusalem and one time of another.

Then there is the Evangelical View, many commentators often understand this phrase, many saviors to be the apostles, or prophets and teachers of the Gospel. In this sense they are saviors, not in the ultimate sense of salvation, but as instruments being used to bring salvation to the world. And the 3rd view is the Millennial view, that all of these things are future, that there will be divinely empowered leaders who will govern with Christ during a future earthly millennial kingdom. In light of biblical prophesy, how it often has an immediate, and a future point, I personally tend to fall between the first and 2nd understanding here, one points to the physical return and redemption of Israel, and the other the spiritual. The prophet Obadiah is foretelling of the return of Israel to their lands after their captivity, so there is a real and genuine sense of a historical literal view, but we also know that all these things are pictures of the promised Messiah, the true redemption, the true savior of his people, so the idea also being the messengers of this gospel hope coming from Zion I think makes sense as well.

And this will continue, there will be “saviors” in that sense, messengers of this gospel message of hope only found in Christ, until the Day of Lord when it will be clear to all nations, and he will bring judgment upon the nations. None shall withstand his wrath, all shall be destroyed except the remnant of his people whom he has chosen to save. Babylon took over Judah, captured her people, and the nations laughed, and they helped suppress the people of God, cutting off their escape, killing and capturing them as it says here in verses 12-14, and they shall pay for this treachery, Verse 15 says, “For the day of the Lord upon all the nations is near, as you have done, it shall be done to you your reprisal shall return upon your own head. As you drank of my holy mountain, so shall all the nations drink continually Yes, they shall drink, and swallow and they shall be as though they have never been.” Babylon, and Edom no longer exists, they are remnants of an ancient time leaving nothing but ruins and artifacts of their existence. Yet, in verse 17, “But on mount Zion there shall be deliverance. And there shall be holiness, and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.”

There was a day of great oppression for Jerusalem, captivity and death, yet a remnant shall be saved, not all shall be cut off as it will be with Edom and Babylon, and they shall return victors to reclaim the land, and shall be given even more than what was before. A message of hope to God’s people, that God will not abandon nor neglect his promises. But until that day, judgment shall rule over the unruly, and God will devour his enemies. Chapter 18 in Revelation which we read this morning speaks of the judgment of Babylon, also it is the judgment of those who have rejected God, who have followed after their sin, who have not turned and repented, in verse 4 of chapter 18 in Revelation notice God calls his people out of the sinful fallen city before her destruction...saving a remnant, saving for himself a people to remain just and holy. “And I heard another voice from heaven saying “come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins and lest you receive her plagues.”

God’s judgment is righteous and holy, and all of mankind deserves his judgment because of our sinful nature and rebellion against him, yet, he is also merciful and gracious in that he spares a remnant, he calls people out of Babylon, out of their sin and rebellion to be his chosen people, a righteous people, a just people, covered by the blood of the one and only spotless lamb of God, Jesus. For us, this is a message of hope, a message of redemption, as we will see justice brought upon the ungodly. Verse 20 in Revelation 18 shows this picture, after the destruction of the wicked it says, “rejoice over her, o heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets for God has avenged you on her! And in 19:3 “Again they said, Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever.” It is then we will truly see the mercy that God has bestowed upon us. Obadiah ends, not in judgment but in deliverance, Israel will return, Jerusalem will be rebuilt, and they shall once again inhabit the promised land, with their enemies defeated, Edom, and Babylon utterly destroyed. This is also a picture of our redemption, the inheritance of the promised land which God has prepared for us of which we will one day rise out of this world captive of sin, and enter into the holy presence of God, a day of great rejoicing, where there is no more sin, no more sadness, having been restored and called up to live in eternity with him.

This is our hope, this is the promise of true redemption, when we will one day finally be free of this body of sin, and united with God in his holy temple. So, until then, we endure this captivity knowing and believing in that coming deliverance for God who can not lie has promised he will return. And we shall be caught up with him in the clouds, to live in paradise for all of eternity.

