

“Obadiah: Proud Heart, Soaring Eagle and Looted Goods”
February 3, 2019
Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church
Dock Hollingsworth, Senior Pastor

¹ *The vision of Obadiah.*

Thus says the Lord GOD concerning Edom:

*We have heard a report from the LORD,
and a messenger has been sent among the nations:*

“Rise up! Let us rise against it for battle!”

² *I will surely make you least among the nations;
you shall be utterly despised.*

³ *Your proud heart has deceived you,
you that live in the clefts of the rock,
whose dwelling is in the heights.*

*You say in your heart,
“Who will bring me down to the ground?”*

⁴ *Though you soar aloft like the eagle,
though your nest is set among the stars,
from there I will bring you down,
says the LORD.*

⁵ *If thieves came to you,
if plunderers by night
—how you have been destroyed!—
would they not steal only what they wanted?*

*If grape-gatherers came to you,
would they not leave gleanings?*

⁶ *How Esau has been pillaged,
his treasures searched out!*

⁷ *All your allies have deceived you,
they have driven you to the border;
your confederates have prevailed against you;
those who ate your bread have set a trap for you—
there is no understanding of it.*

⁸ *On that day, says the LORD,*

*I will destroy the wise out of Edom,
and understanding out of Mount Esau.*

*⁹ Your warriors shall be shattered, O Teman,
so that everyone from Mount Esau will be cut off.*

*¹⁰ For the slaughter and violence done to your brother Jacob,
shame shall cover you,
and you shall be cut off forever.*

*¹¹ On the day that you stood aside,
on the day that strangers carried off his wealth,
and foreigners entered his gates
and cast lots for Jerusalem,
you too were like one of them.*

*¹² But you should not have gloated over your brother
on the day of his misfortune;
you should not have rejoiced over the people of Judah
on the day of their ruin;
you should not have boasted
on the day of distress.*

*¹³ You should not have entered the gate of my people
on the day of their calamity;
you should not have joined in the gloating over Judah's disaster
on the day of his calamity;
you should not have looted his goods
on the day of his calamity.*

*¹⁴ You should not have stood at the crossings
to cut off his fugitives;
you should not have handed over his survivors
on the day of distress.*

I don't want to brag. It would be indecorous of me to boast, but there is a chance that on this very day, you may hear the finest sermon, the very best sermon you have ever heard on the Book of Obadiah. Okay, you've never heard a sermon from Obadiah, but I still want some credit if anybody asks. Obadiah is one of only five books not included in the Lectionary, it is the thinnest of all the Minor Prophets, and Obadiah is also the smallest book in the whole of the Old Testament. Ignored, like the quiet kid in Middle School.

I also thought it would be fun to start off the sermon with some bragging because the theme of this sermon and service is the sin of pride – which, of course, is listed as one of the Seven Deadly Sins.

By the way, during the season of Lent, David Hull is going to teach a Wednesday night series on the Seven Deadly Sins – and you will want to be here because I’ve encouraged him to illustrate from within the congregation as much as possible, as a way of generating interest and attendance. I hope you will be here to hear your name called.

But, of the Seven Deadly Sins, pride is the one that intrigues me most – because pride seems to be the sin, we are most, well, proud of. Have you noticed, we happily declare our pride to each other, and we don’t do that with any of the other sins? For instance, we say:

- *“Mommy’s proud of you for asking to be excused from the table.”*
- *“I’m proud of my son, he just made captain in the Air Force.”*
- *“Every Sunday when I leave church, I’m just so proud to be a part of Second-Ponce.”*

So, catch the irony here – we are proud of being proud. We just don’t do that with any of the other Seven Deadlies:

- *“Hey, hey, I’ve just finished another day filled with sloth and unproductivity.”*
- *“Guess what – I lusted today.”*

See? So, how is it, that we are proud of being proud when pride is depicted as one of the Seven Deadly Sins?

Well, I’m being playful - the truth is, we use the same word for a range of experience. Pride, in the biblical sense, is not delighting in a grandchild who’s just become potty trained. Biblical pride is not pleasure in our association with our alma mater or our church or our country, or our family. Pride, in the Bible, is self-overestimation. Pride is arrogance, hubris, vanity. Pride is liking me a lot and just being full of me all of the time.

It is Super Bowl week in Atlanta – perhaps we can illustrate the difference between pride of association, pride in the accomplishments of others, and the arrogant pride of over-estimation.

Tom Brady might not be the posterchild for humility but his statement of pride for his Patriot's making the Super Bowl is not self-serving, vanity. This is an example of the noble pride of association:

*"It's pretty amazing. Just to be on a team that wins these kinds of games, it's just a great accomplishment," Brady said. "I'm just so proud of everyone on our team, we made so many great plays. Defense played so great when they needed to."*¹

He's proud, but there is no hubris – no *"look at me – I'm all that"*.

Compare that to the words of 2012 Super Bowl winning quarterback Joe Flacco. The Baltimore Ravens QB told TV station WNST in Baltimore, *"I mean, I think I'm the best. I don't think I'm top five, I think I'm the best."*²

That would be some biblical pride. Sometimes, be careful, sometimes our pride in association, in identification, can slide over to arrogance – it happens. Pride in being Irish is not a sin, but in its extreme form it can easily slide to racism. Patriotism, in its extreme is Jingoism. Pride in association can run amok. It happens in our biblical story today. The Edomites went from being proud to have a flag flying on their front porch and a CD of Lee Greenwood singing, *"I'm proud to be an Edomite"* – to operating out of the sinful pride, the arrogance that struts and overestimates, and exploits.

- You will remember that when I preached from Amos and Micah, it was a time of peace in the United Kingdom and those prophets were railing at the Israelites for living fat and exploiting those without voice or power.
- Then, in 722, the Northern Kingdom is destroyed by the Assyrians and we listened to the prophets Zephaniah and Habakkuk as they preached courageously to their culture and context.
- But, in the next 20-year period, Jerusalem is attacked by three different waves of military attack and ultimately destroyed and run out by the Babylonians. The country was devastated, national institutions dismantled, and leaders deported. The Israelites who were not killed in the military destruction were banished, sent into exile about 400 miles away.

¹ The Associated Press, [Patriots advance to 8th Super Bowl in Brady, Belichick era](#), January 21, 2018

² Mike Florio, [Joe Flacco thinks he's "the best" quarterback in football](#), PFT online, posted April 3, 2012

But just to the south of Jerusalem, bordering Judah to the south, is the Kingdom of Edom. Back when, Edom was part of the United Kingdom – they enjoyed the days of peace and prosperity in Israel’s good days - but when trouble started and war broke out, they just closed their doors and shutters and put their fingers in their ears. They were no help to their neighbor kingdom under attack.

In fact, they felt a little smug. There was a high hill that separated the Kingdom of Edam from Judah, and it was a good post for fending off any armies that might approach below. They were proud of their advantage and proud that their territory was still untouched and proud to be disassociated with those pitiful Israelites who were getting the tar beat out of them. And, what’s worse, not only did they not help their neighbor and former friends, they came along after the devastation and looted. They came behind and stole what was left that might be of value.

We’ve seen these scenes on television, like after a natural disaster, when the town has been vacated and then we see footage of a group of young guys smashing in storefront windows and stealing TVs, looting all they can carry, because nobody is around to stop them from taking what they want. That is what the Edomites did when Israel was on the run.

But as the Book of Proverbs states, “*Pride cometh before the fall.*”³

Their national pride had gone from patriotism and honorable association with their heritage, to the kind of pride that fosters selfishness and arrogance. Like Nazi Germany, they feel indestructible and believe that a thousand-year Reich is their due. They are fortified by their high, strategic advantage and they strut and think they are just too much. But all governments are provisional – none is perfect, no rule is absolute. When the government turns evil and claims indestructible and absolute power, they are ripe for destruction - and the prophet Obadiah, speaking the words of God, lets them have it. Obadiah declares, in no uncertain terms, that their pride is going to lead to their ruin and that God is the only ultimate power. Obadiah speaks for God saying,

*² I will surely make you least among the nations;
you shall be utterly despised.*

*³ Your proud heart has deceived you,
you that live in the clefts of the rock,*

³ Proverbs 16:18 KJV

*whose dwelling is in the heights.
 You say in your heart,
 "Who will bring me down to the ground?"
⁴ Though you soar aloft like the eagle,
 though your nest is set among the stars,
 from there I will bring you down,
 says the LORD.*

The Edomites remind me of Gaston in Beauty and the Beast. Do you remember the handsome Gaston who just can't believe that Belle is not taken with him because, well, he's the total package?

*No one's slick as Gaston
 No one's quick as Gaston
 No one's neck's as incredibly thick as Gaston's⁴*

Pride run amok. And, remember, Edom not only turned their backs and did not help their neighbor, but they also ransacked their treasures after they were run out of town. Obadiah preaches:

*¹¹ On the day that you stood aside,
 on the day that strangers carried off his wealth,
 and foreigners entered his gates
 and cast lots for Jerusalem,
 you too were like one of them.
¹² But you should not have gloated over your brother
 on the day of his misfortune;
 you should not have rejoiced over the people of Judah
 on the day of their ruin;
 you should not have boasted
 on the day of distress.
¹³ You should not have entered the gate of my people
 on the day of their calamity;*

⁴ Josh Gad, Gaston, from the movie Beauty and the Beast

*you should not have joined in the gloating over Judah's disaster
on the day of his calamity;
you should not have looted his goods
on the day of his calamity.*

But Gaston doesn't care about anybody but Gaston.

It's tricky. We want to cultivate, self-worth, healthy self-esteem. We want to cultivate a healthy pride, pride in our appearance, pride in our deportment, pride in our associations that bring us pleasure. But careful – when it slips into a “better than”, a “look at me”, a showy arrogance – well, to quote Obadiah, *“Your proud heart has deceived you... from there I will bring you down, says the LORD.”*

But what you know, because you've seen it over and over, is that people with a healthy self-assurance, people with the most inner peace and often with the most accomplishment, tend to be the humblest. Jesus said, *“Blessed are the meek”* and they are the people I admire most.

I think of President Eisenhower instructing that he be buried in the \$80 government issued casket of an infantry officer. The most accomplished are often the most humble.

I was friends with our former governor, George Busbee. We became close friends when I was interim pastor of the Parkway Baptist Church in Duluth, where he was a member. We played tennis together and even vacationed together once and I admired him. Parkway sits in the Platinum Triangle, around the corner from the Atlanta Athletic Club, a community of accomplishment and shiny cars. An one Sunday morning, Governor Busbee said something to me that was totally uncharacteristic of him. He pulled me aside and started off by saying, *“Dock, you know that I'm a powerful man, don't you?”* Well, that got my attention. In spite of our friendship, when the former governor starts with that, you straighten up. I said, *“Yes sir.”* He then pointed up to the audio control room that was cut into the wall on the second floor. He grinned and said, *“I'm running the controls today in the sound booth and I can cut your sermon silent anytime I feel like it.”*

When the former Governor of Georgia runs the sound booth at church you know what it looks like to have conquered pride. *“Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth.”*

- If you are new to our church, that is our project here. We come together each week to worship God, and to work on becoming the most loving version of ourselves.

- You are loved. And, by God’s transforming love, we are saved from our selfishness, liberated to live out of a different vision of reality. If you want to say “yes” to God’s transforming love, modeled perfectly in Jesus – if you are ready to say “yes” to the disciplined life of becoming unselfish and whole, I will be down front to welcome you.
- If you feel like it is time to join this church as a place where you can grow in community and exercise and practice what it means to be transformed - this church will welcome you, as one of us, another broken and beautiful one for whom Christ died. Come, as we sing together.