

According to Jeff Kennett, outspoken ex premier of Victoria, Christians are "People of the Past". That's what he said. He said it when Christians raised objections to the Crown Casino. "To object to something like that," he said, "meant you were out of step with the community." How could you possibly object to something that would be such a revenue raiser for the state? That would bring so many tourists, particularly overseas tourists, to Victoria. Just because a few families will suffer, just because gambling is addictive. So what! If you're a Christian, he said, you're living in the past. So get with it! Go down to the casino and enjoy yourself... Now I wonder how you feel when you hear people say things like that. That Christianity is a spent force. Do you get angry? Does it worry you?

There are times when I find myself wondering if maybe they're right. Maybe we are out of date. In the past, politicians took us seriously. Business leaders listened to what we said about ethics. Sunday was set apart as a special day. But not any more. Nowadays no-one seems to care what Christians think. As long as they're there to do the social welfare jobs the government doesn't want to pay for.

But it isn't just in the political field. In the sciences, in education, in welfare, even in moral or religious issues, people are nowadays quick to write us Christians off. But when we look at the book of Obadiah, we find this is not something new. People have been writing off the people of God for centuries. Like the people of Edom.

You see the book of Obadiah is about what will happen to the country of Edom. Now to understand this book you need to know that Edom was the country next door to Israel. The Edomites were descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother. And there was a long standing family feud between the Edomites and the Israelites that ran right back through the family tree. Edom has always opposed the people of God. So what will God do to this nation that has opposed his people?

1. What will happen (verses 1-9) Well right at the beginning of the book, we read that Obadiah, the prophet receives a vision of the nations rising up and going into battle against Edom but behind these nations is the hand of God. As he says in verse 2 "*I will make you small.*" And again in verse 4, "*Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,*" declares the LORD."

God is coming in judgement on this nation. And what he will do doesn't make very nice reading. He will send a disaster upon them. These nations will war against them and their fortresses and defences will be toppled.

Now the central area of Edom is characterized by red sandstone cliffs

that rise to heights of more than 5,000 feet above sea level. These are easily fortified. So as a result of having made their home within this natural fortress, the people of Edom were free to wage war and levy tribute on others while themselves being relatively free from outside interference. So they developed a commando style of warfare where they would attack and destroy and then retreat into these vast caverns, that were nearly impossible to access. In fact some of the clefts in the rocks were just a couple of metres wide and so were easily defended.

But if God is against you, you can never defend yourself. The armies will get in. And it won't be like when thieves attack, they won't only take the valuable things. It won't be like when the pickers go through a crop, with some fruit left missed or left for the poor. Nothing will be left. All will be ransacked and destroyed. Edom's strengths, their location, their wise men, and their treasures, will all be completely destroyed.

Now we don't like to hear about this sort of judgement today. We sought of hope that there will be no such thing as a day of reckoning, a day of truth, unless we are talking about others, unless someone has hurt us and they in the end will get what their deeds deserve. Then boy do we want judgement. Then we want people to pay.

So when Australians are caught with drugs in Bali or Singapore and so fresh faced young men and women might face the death penalty, we are up in arms about this sort of justice. But how many times have we seen families of someone who has been murdered or raped or on the steps of the courthouse, complaining that justice was not done. That the convicted got off lightly. That they should hang for what they have did.

Writing in a recent newspaper article, journalist Paul Sheehan spoke of the pain and frustration of many rape victims in seeking justice. In highlighting the notorious case of a woman attacked by 14 men, Sheehan commented forlornly, "She will never get justice."

But of course Sheehan is wrong. For there is a day coming when every victim of abuse and oppression - sexual, physical, emotion, psychological - every victim will receive justice. There is a day when every abuser, every oppressor, whether found in the corridors of political power, in the classroom, in the pulpit, in the home, in the workplace, every one will get their just deserts.

And the book of Obadiah says that a picture of that day will be like the destruction of Edom. And so according to verse 15, "*The day of the LORD is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head.*" So that's what will happen, just judgement will come, but

2. Why will it happen? (verses 10-16) What have the Edomites done to deserve such harsh treatment? Lets look at our next section, from

verse 10. *“Because of the violence against your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame; you will be destroyed forever.”* Edom was a nation full of violence. Violent conduct towards others. Violence unchecked amongst itself. But what’s more this violence was even allowed in their families, amongst their own brothers and sisters. Including violence towards God’s people, their fellow brothers the Israelites.

God hates violence within any society. He made each person in his own image. He gave them a dignity, a respect, that we should also give to others. So when we abuse others, when we physically assert our own rights over others, when we are violent, not only are we wrongfully downgrading people, we are slapping God in the face as well.

But the Edomites were not just violent, they were proud. Look back with me to v 3. *“The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, ‘Who can bring me down to the ground?’”*

Pride, we think today it’s a virtue, but God hates human pride. Because pride leads to the kind of self-sufficiency where one says "I don't need God. I can run my own life without God, in my own wisdom, my own strength, my own abilities." So pride is living life for yourself, not humbling yourself before your creator, your God.

But sometimes we Christians fall into the trap of self sufficiency and pride. We say, "Well, I need God, yes, in times of danger and fear and pressure, but I am quite able, thank you, to make my own decisions about the girl I am going to marry, or the career I am going to follow, or the friends that I have, or the car that I buy or anything else like that." That is the same spirit of self sufficiency, isn't it?

What about when you step into your office on Thursday morning after having been to midweekchurch the night before. Do you say to yourself, "Now I know what to do here. I don't need the Bible. I don't need God. I don't need my religion to help me now. I know exactly how to run this business," When you do that you are manifesting this same spirit of Edom, this spirit of self-sufficiency, this love of yourself, this pride.

You’ve no doubt heard of the lady who was aboard the Titanic and asked a crewman if the ship really was unsinkable. The crewman responded, "God Himself could not sink this ship." A similar spirit prevailed in Edom. Believing that God Himself could not bring them low, they were deceived by their pride.

Charles Spurgeon at the height of his ministry, once wrote, *“Success can go to your head, and it will, unless I remember that it is God who accomplishes the work. That He can continue to do so without my*

help, and that he will be able to make out with other means whenever He chooses or cuts me down to size.”

Violence and pride deserve judgement. But there was one further incident that Obadiah picks up and we find that in verses 12, 13 and 14. They did nothing. Absolutely nothing. For in 586 BC God allowed armies to surround Jerusalem for around two years. Food ran out. People starved. Desperation grew. And then the Babylonians were able to overtake the city and completely annihilated it. Destroyed the Temple. Plundered its riches. Deported its people. Humiliated it completely. And the Edomites, what did they do? They did nothing.

Here were their own flesh and blood, their own kith and kin and they did nothing. They stood aloof. They looked down on them. They rejoiced. They boasted. They refused to lend a hand in their time of need. They did nothing. And by doing nothing they aligned themselves with the enemies of the people of God.

I once heard a saying that has made a big impact on me. It goes like this *“All it takes for evil to flourish is for a few good people do nothing.”* (Repeat.) Basically what it is saying is that if we could stop evil and don't, then we are part of the problem not the solution. If we wash our hands of someone's business when we should have got involved. If we should have told them about Jesus and instead we remained silent. If we could reach out in the time of trouble and we are too busy or just plain don't care, then we have allowed evil to flourish & Obadiah will tell us that doing nothing makes us culpable.

But it gets worse. For at first the Edomites do nothing, then according to verse 13, after the enemies armies leave, they march through the city gates and they then seize what's left of their wealth. They cut down the fugitives at the cross roads. And then they do in the survivors on their day of trouble.

Don't forget it's the people of God they're toying with. Even in this disaster, even if their punishment is by God's hand, Obadiah wants the Edomites to know that the Israelites are still the people of God. Which means they're not to be messed with. So even as they are carted off in disgrace, God hasn't finished with them or those who have opposed them.

God has judged his people. Now God is about to judge the surrounding nations. In the end God will judge every nation and every one justly. Have we been proud? Are we self sufficient? Are we a nation of violence? Have we turned our back on evil and done nothing? Have we kicked others when they were down? Have we mistreated the people of God? As Thomas Jefferson once said *“I tremble for my country, when I reflect that God is just.”*

So how are we going to cope on the day of reckoning? How are we

going to stand before a just judge? The story is told of a politician who after receiving the proofs of a portrait, was very angry with the photographer. He stormed back to the photographer and arrived with these angry words: "this picture does not do me justice!" The photographer replied, "Sir with a face like yours, you don't need justice, you need mercy!" And that's what Obadiah turns to at the end. He thinks through not just what will happen and why it will happen but lastly,

3. How will it happen? (V 17-21) And mercifully, God will bring salvation in the midst of judgement. He will raise up his people & He will keep his promises to them. He will extend his Kingdom to reach all the earth. Lets look at these last few verses together, shall we?

"But on Mount Zion will be deliverance; it will be holy, and the house of Jacob will possess its inheritance." In the end God will deliver. He will bring about a reversal. The vanquished will become victors. The oppressed will rise up again. The house of Jacob, the people of God will again be given their rightful place. The promised land will again be theirs. God will keep his promises. So much so that the book ends with the words of hope, that *"Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau. And the kingdom will be the Lord's."*

God's Kingdom will come. God's sovereignty will mean that he will rule. God's people will be secure. Justice will be done. God has promised it and he has the power to bring about all of his promises.

You know, the words of Obadiah were fulfilled in a surprising way. He says Edom would disappear off the map. And it has. Where's Edom today? It's been overtaken and over run so many times, there's not even a trace of it any more. But there's another kingdom that's grown and flourished, that reaches all over the world. What kingdom? The Kingdom of God.

And when Jesus came, what were his first public words? "The Kingdom of God is at hand." The deliverer has finally come. And as he heads up the hilly road to Jerusalem on a donkey, the people wave palm branches, and recognise him as the Messiah, the deliverer, Except he brings deliverance in a most unexpected way. Just a few days later, the crown he's crowned with is a crown of thorns. And he's nailed up on a cross as a criminal. And he dies there, a substitute. A perfect sacrifice for the sins of his people. Opening up the way for true justice to be done. Our sins dealt with and forgiven. Us to be reconciled with God. And then he rises and ascends, and he rules with God. Over a kingdom that extends to every nation on earth.

It's a kingdom that might not look much. Just ordinary people like you and me who have taken Jesus as our King. It's a kingdom that people can laugh at. And mock. Just like the Edomites mocked Israel. But although some people delight in saying the sort of thing Jeff Kennett

said: "Christians are people of the past," just remember, if you're facing that sort of thing yourself, the truth is exactly the opposite. Obadiah says God's Kingdom will last even when all other kingdoms have past away.

And he's still right. See, we mightn't look like much. But the humblest, most lowly Christian is still going to be there in eternity. Long after the powers of this world are gone. Long after Jeff Kennett himself, if he hasn't turned to God for salvation, has become very much a person of the past. While we'll still be there: celebrating in God's kingdom. Because we've hung onto his promises, without letting go.

Let's remember that, the next time we're facing a hard time for our faith? Next time someone laughs, the next time someone abuses us because we follow Jesus. Next time we're tempted to just give up, because it's tough. Next time we're caught up in the things of this world that want to drag us away from God. There's only one Kingdom that's going to last. Everything else will go. Remember, we're not people of the past. According to God's promises, we're the people with a future.