

Pastor Tom Mortenson

Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

October 26, 2014

Obadiah

1 Kings 18:1-14

Prayer: *Father, I do thank you for your grace, I thank you for your goodness, I just thank you for this church. I just -- we just stand basking in the blessing that you have given us in the freedom that we have to meet each week without worrying about what's going to be come through those doors. I just again think of our brothers and sisters across the world who have that worry and we just lift them up as well. We pray as we open your word freely that we would have the privilege and the presence of your Holy Spirit, that you would guide us, that you would enable us to hear your word and again make it a permanent part of our lives. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

A CNBC article last week said this, it said: Every week, a government weather agency releases a report on the conditions of California's drought. And every week seems to bring grim news. The latest report is no exception. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said Thursday that California's record-setting drought -- heading into its fourth year -- will

likely persist or even intensify in large parts of the state. Water supplies in the three largest reservoirs are at only about 30 percent of capacity. Other water sources are also drying up. Residents, too, are feeling the pain. Some 500 people in Tulare County, in the central part of the state, cannot flush a toilet, wash clothes or drink water out of the tap because water sources have dried up.

Just try to imagine what it is like if you're living in California and you understand that all of these terrible things are happening and yet they have all kinds of resources to deal with this kind of a drought, and even with those resources they are really nearing their wits end. Just try to imagine what it must have been like after a similar period of time in a country that had no technology, no resources, a country that was agricultural in which water was everything. If you take a look at *1 Kings 18:1-2* we see this is the story that was taking place in the country of Israel. It says: *After many days the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, "Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth." So Elijah went to show himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria.*

Now as you all know, we've been looking at the story of Elijah and we've watched as Elijah has struggled with this idea of God growing

him into a great man of faith, we've seen played out in his life a pattern that is designed by God to produce a prophet who was fully convinced that God could do whatever it is he said he would do. And so I pointed out last time that Elijah, well, he's this iconic figure in scripture and while we all might sense that God is doing great and mighty things through Elijah in his life, well, we have a much harder time imagining that God is going to work in the lives of nobodies like you and me. We spent last week looking at the life of a nobody. Actually two nobodies. We spent last week looking at the life of the widow and her young son, and we saw last week that God demonstrated he had the power of life over death and we saw that because he raised her young son up from -- he raised her young son up from the dead. And so we saw lived out what we were talking about with *Romans 8:28: All things really do work together for good to those who love God and who are called according to his purpose.* And again, the good that we have in mind here is not health, it's not wealth, it's not prosperity, it is conformity to the image of God's son. God has said over and over again, every single event in our lives is designed to shape and to mold us into the image of Jesus Christ. And that's God's master plan for every one of us. And watching God work out his plan not just in Elijah's life but in the life of this obscure Sidonian widow and her son, well that gives us hope that God's doing the very same thing in our lives.

And this morning I want to focus in on yet another nobody who is in this story. It's a man by the name of Obadiah. Obadiah appears for just a few paragraphs and then he disappears completely from the pages of scripture. This is not the same Obadiah who was one of the minor prophets, that's a man of a different time, he lived a life very different, very differently than this Obadiah. This Obadiah is kind of like Esther. God placed him in a unique position "*for such a time as this,*" and actually the nobody who Obadiah is was actually quite a somebody when it came to political power. We could probably call him wicked King Ahab's chief of staff. And he was obviously very close to King Ahab, but at the same time he was profoundly loyal to the God of Israel. What a strange partnership we see. I mean, Ahab is profoundly wicked, he's married to Jezebel who is not simply persecuting the Jews now, she is routinely slaughtering them at this point. She's doing everything that she can to eradicate the one threat to Baal worship that she still sees remaining, that's the God of Israel. And we get introduced to Obadiah at the same time as we learned that God has now instructed Elijah to reconnect with this wicked King Ahab.

So Elijah begins looking for Ahab and we know for a fact that Ahab has been looking for Elijah for a long time. Again, *1 Kings 18* says: *After many days the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the*

third year, saying, "Go show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth." So Elijah went to show himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria. And Ahab called Obadiah, who was over the household. Okay. So this point -- at this point we are just merely introduced to Obadiah, and we get the fact that he's a very powerful political person, he's in charge of Ahab's household, but our introduction includes a very powerful description of a man who was leading two very different lives. Verse 3 continues, it says: *(Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly, and when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water.)* So this introduction tells us three things about Obadiah that we never would have guessed. Number one, Obadiah feared God greatly. Number two, he was secretly frustrating Jezebel's attack on the God of Israel by hiding and protecting his prophets. And number three, he had taken full responsibility for each of these men. You see, Obadiah used the position that he was in to first take severe risks for God; secondly, to use his resources for God's kingdom; and thirdly, to take responsibility for the choices that he had made. And as such, Obadiah is a model for us all.

So let me just take a look at the first one. This is the risks that Obadiah was willing to take for God. The scripture says: *Now the famine was severe in Samaria.* You got to remember, first of

all, that Jezebel and Ahab's gods, these are gods that represent agricultural fertility. And so this drought and the subsequent famine is a direct attack on the power that those gods claimed to possess. And at this point in the narrative, things are so bad that the king himself along with his trusted aid Obadiah, he's desperately searching for some last remaining pastureland. Verse 5 says this: *And Ahab said to Obadiah, "Go through the land and to all the springs of water and to all the valleys. Perhaps we may find grass and save of the horses and mules alive, and not lose some of the animals."* So they divided the land between them to pass through it. Ahab went in one direction by himself, and Obadiah went in another direction by himself. Well, you know, their only hope is to find some kind of oasis in this desert that Israel is becoming. And every single day that brought more crop and cattle disaster only served to enrage Jezebel against the God that Elijah represented as well as his prophets. And we know for a fact that she was killing God's representatives and we know that because Obadiah tells us why he had hidden the prophets. In verse 13, it says this, this is Obadiah to Elijah, he says: *Has it not been told my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the LORD, how I hid a hundred men of the Lord's prophets by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water?"* What do you think Obadiah's fate would have been if Jezebel learned that the closest confidante to the king himself was hiding, protecting, and feeding

the very prophets of the God who was destroying their country? I mean, Obadiah clearly risked life and limb as did Elijah as well.

So that raises my first question and that is: Have you ever taken a risk for the kingdom of God? I mean, we know right now that there are grave risks that our brothers and sisters are taking throughout the Middle East, throughout Africa, throughout the radicalized countries where simply identifying yourself as a Christian could be fatal. You know, I make it my business to read through *The Voice of the Martyrs* magazine each month and I'm continually stunned at the risks that believers routinely take to share the gospel. Our risks here in North America are strictly social. We bask in the blessedness of an historically Christian country and the only risk we ever really undertake is someone thinking that perhaps we're a little weird, maybe a little forward, a little different, too forward perhaps with our expression of the gospel, although I think that may be changing, and I think it may be changing as the politics of homosexuality begin to heat up.

That is, if you've been following the news, you've probably heard that in the city of Houston, five area pastors have had their sermons subpoenaed to be examined for their content on the issue of homosexuality. This is a very complicated case. And it's a case of extraordinary overreach by Houston's homosexual mayor. It

started out by her trying to pass legislation insisting that the city's bathrooms be open to both sexes so as not to offend the transgendered which as was pointed out, that means that in the city of Houston, should this law pass, your eight-year-old daughter would have to share a bathroom with a 40-year-old man just so that transgendered folks would not be offended. Well, the people objected to this and they submitted a petition with many, many thousands of signatures to overturn the -- this law, and her lawyers, well they just threw the petition out. They said it was illegal. And as a result, lawyers representing the people of Houston sued and now her lawyers are demanding that any and all communication by any of these pastors from the pulpit and otherwise that have anything to do with the subject of homosexuality be subpoenaed. It's a blatant attempt at intimidation by a government official, and these pastors know this well. In fact, most of the sermons were already public as most churches like we do, they put their stuff on the Internet. But the pastors responded to this power grab by absolutely refusing to comply with the subpoena even under the threat of imprisonment.

You know, some folks have a problem with this, some folks have a problem on what they think is a scriptural basis because after all, the Bible does tell us that we are to submit to the local authorities. You know, *Romans 13* says: *Let every person be*

subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. There you go. I mean, God says flat out that he appoints governmental authority, both the good and the bad and at the time that these words were written, well, most government authorities were overwhelmingly bad. I mean, they routinely pillaged and murdered their subjects. Now this is something that our government does not yet do, unless of course you're the unborn. But Peter in the book of Acts gives us a much broader perspective on what our responsibility is when it comes to obeying governmental authorities. If you remember, Peter's just been released from prison in the book of Acts, miraculously released, and he's preaching that Jesus Christ has died and that his resurrection was proof that the sacrifice on the cross had been accepted, and the authorities are furious. They're convinced that they had gotten rid of Jesus forever and now Peter is bringing him right back up again and he's bringing him up right in their face as the sovereign Lord of the universe, and so they're understandably frustrated. And as the duly constituted governmental authorities, they forbid Peter from preaching the gospel. This is how Acts describes it in Acts 5:28. This is what the authorities said to Peter, they said: "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with

your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us."
But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. Got exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them.

Well, here's Peter, he's flat out disobeying the governmental authorities because they were extending their sphere of authority into areas in which they had none. They were extending it into an area of God's kingdom where he rules supreme. And make no mistake about it, Peter was following a tradition of civil disobedience and it was something that had been established for hundreds and hundreds of years. In fact our scripture this morning describes one such incident. Obadiah was a lawbreaker. He was defying a duly constituted authority, the authority of Ahab and Jezebel and he was defying it by hiding and feeding the prophets. And Ahab and Jezebel were extending their authority into places where it didn't belong even to the point of executing God's spokesmen. Well, the five pastors in Houston are doing the exact same thing that Peter did. They are refusing to obey an authority that has overreached its bound and has attempted to enter into an authority that belongs

to God alone. So I just wanted to take this opportunity to publicly say that I am and we are as a church 100 percent behind these pastors. You know, I've stated our position on homosexuality and gay marriage many, many times, and we believe and we will state it over and over again that it is a sin just like any other sin, that this church is made up of sinners all saved by God's grace alone and that if you want to reckon with the sin of homosexuality, we would be glad to walk with you on that journey. If you want to insist, however, against the overwhelming evidence of scripture that homosexuality is anything but a sin issue, well, then we're going to have a problem. And I'm saying all this as much to inform you of what's going on in the culture as to also publicly state for the record that we stand 100 percent with the Houston pastors. In fact, it's my intention to send a copy of this sermon to the city of Houston's mayor after it's done, after Gigi types it up just to add our voice to the flood of sermons that pastors all over the country are sending her. And once again I want to point out that if this is the extent of the persecution we in America are under -- and I believe it is -- then the risk of sharing the gospel in this culture is very close to zero. For Obadiah that risk was off the charts and yet he chose to take that risk.

What I also admire about Obadiah is that he took great risks, but he wasn't foolhardy. Listen to this conversation that he has when

he meets up with Elijah. This is verse 7. It says: *And as Obadiah was on the way, behold, Elijah met him. And Obadiah recognized him and fell on his face and said, "Is it you, my lord Elijah?" And he answered him, "It is I. Go, tell your lord, 'Behold, Elijah is here.'" And he said, "How have I sinned, that you would give your servant into the hand of Ahab, to kill me? As the LORD your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my lord has not sent to seek you. And when they would say, 'He is not here,' he would take an oath of the kingdom or nation, that they had not found you. And now you say, 'Go tell your lord, "Behold, Elijah is here." And as soon as I have gone from you, the spirit of the LORD will carry you I know not where. And so when I come and tell Ahab and he cannot find you, he will kill me, although I your servant have feared the LORD from my youth."*

Now this really is an amazing conversation. Obadiah greets the great prophet Elijah and Elijah tells him, you know, go let Ahab know that Elijah has returned. And Obadiah flat out tells him, you know, that's not really going to work for me. I mean, he's -- he basically is defying Elijah. And he also reveals in this conversation the nature of the relationship that he has with Ahab. You know, he may be Ahab's chief of staff but he clearly recognizes that his life isn't worth a plug nickel in Ahab's eyes. And so Obadiah may be willing to take extraordinary risks but he's not

willing to take unnecessary ones and simply showing up before Ahab with the information that I saw the illusive Elijah but I didn't arrest him, well, that's for him an unnecessary risk. And Obadiah backs up the risk that he's willing to take by pointing out the resources that he's devoted to maintaining God's prophets. This is what he says in verse 13, he says: *"Has it not been told my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the LORD, how I hid a hundred men of the LORD's prophets by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water? And now you say, 'Go, tell your Lord, "Behold, Elijah is here"' ; and he will kill me."* Try having a hundred people over every single night and you get a sense of what type of resources Obadiah had to commit in order to maintain God's people. This is not something he's going to do at government expense. In fact, if Jezebel ever found out what he had done, he would certainly lose his life.

Now there's no doubt that Obadiah was a person of means because he was a high government official, but he was also someone who recognized that God had put him in a certain place for just a time as this. You know, there was only one primary resource keeping God's people alive in those caves and that resource had a name; the name was Obadiah. And God had given him considerable resources with the expectation that he would pass those resources on, because he was blessed to be a blessing. And you know, that's the reason

why God blesses anybody any time from Abraham at the very beginning of scripture to the steward that Jesus refers to at the end. I mean, God told Abraham right at the start of scripture why he was abundantly blessing him. Listen to what he says in *Genesis 12:2*. He says: *And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.* He's blessed to bless. Jesus toward the end of his ministry on earth spoke of what that responsibility really entails. He said this in *Luke 12:48*, he says: *"Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more."* And so the principle established in scripture from the very beginning in Genesis all the way to the end is that the blessings that God gives are always blessings that God intends us to pass on.

Now, we may think it was easy for Obadiah to bless others because after all, he was wealthy. But all wealth is relative. I mean, I know and we all know how difficult this economy has been, but our situation needs to be seen as God sees it, and he sees it in the context of the entire world. You know what the median income for a household in Port Jervis was in 2012? I do. It was \$34,400. I bet you don't know that that income is in the richest 13 percent of the entire world's population, which is to say 87 percent of the world does worse than Port Jervis. In fact, our income is more

than 9.3 times the global average. And so by any objective standard that includes the whole world, we're not just wealthy, we are fabulously wealthy. Please don't misunderstand me. I'm not -- this is not a fundraising issue at all. We've been blessed abundantly. I mean, our church almost always meets its budget. You've been incredibly generous. It's just that I believe that we as a church and we as individuals can do more. You know, we're talking about as a church increasing our missions budget and individually giving over and above to other organizations like Samaritan's Purse, or Voice Of The Martyrs or IJM. I'm talking about taking the responsibility of sponsoring a child or family through World Vision or Compassion International, something like that. I mean, Obadiah did it for a hundred. Maybe we could do it for one. You see, when it comes to resources, I just think giving stuff away is nothing more than a prudent way of planning for the future. You know, many of us here have met with financial planners and they've convinced us of the wisdom of putting money aside now so that we'll have something to spend when we're in retirement, and retirement for most people lasts for a couple of decades. Eternity lasts forever. I firmly believe in sending ahead of us real money spent on the kingdom today that will be available to us to spend for the rest of eternity.

And that's exactly how Jesus puts it in *Matthew 6:19*. Listen to

what he says. He says: *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal."* You know, we've just heard it said so many times that I think we lose sight of what Jesus is actually claiming here. Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. You can bank it here and spend it there. I mean, we know for a fact that God has such a finely tuned accounting system that it records items as small as a cup of cold water and a widow's mite. That's a pretty good accounting system. Doesn't it make sense that every single penny that you send forward by donating it to kingdom work is in fact the very resources that you will draw on in eternity? I have very little doubt that the wealth that we'll have in heaven will be based largely on the wealth that we give away here on earth. As Jim Elliott put it, I don't know necessarily he put it in terms of money but he said, "He is no fool who gives up that which he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."

So Obadiah not only took great risks for the kingdom but he also devoted considerable resources towards supporting God's people. In other words, he laid up for himself considerable resources in heaven. What makes Obadiah a hero in my eyes is not just the risks that he took or the resources that he made available but the

responsibility that he took for God's people. I mean, Obadiah took responsibility for a hundred individuals. He simply made them his neighbors. You know, we might ask ourselves the same question the lawyer asked Jesus when he asked him to state what God required of all of us in *Luke 10:25*. This is what it says, it says: *And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And he said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"* I mean, the question was just who is it that I am responsible for? And Jesus when asked "Who is my neighbor," he describes the most unlikely of neighbors. He describes a man who was beaten and blooded and unconscious, desperately in need of first aid. So what Jesus is saying is that anyone whose need comes into my world becomes, in effect, my neighbor. That is, a person becomes your neighbor based on his need and your knowledge and ability to fill that need. And we all know how the story goes. I mean, a priest and a Levite, they walk right past the man in his desperate need and there's three different individuals who happen to come into his world but only one, this lowly Samaritan responds,

and he responds by making him his neighbor.

Now things for us in the 21st century are vastly different than they were in Jesus' day. I mean, in Jesus' day you would really have to physically come in contact with somebody to know that they had this need. Today all of that's changed. I mean, via the Internet today, we have the ability to connect with anybody in the world on a moment's notice. I mean, I have the ability to walk right now into the needs of over a billion people. Are they all my neighbors? And if not, then who today really is my neighbor? I mean, given that broad a mandate, how do we know what Christ would expect my answer to that question to be? Who is my neighbor? I think it's whomever God makes into your neighbor. I mean, for instance *The Voice of the Martyrs*, well, it's made Gao Zhisheng, it's made Asia Bibi, it's made Saeed Abedini and many others our neighbors. I mean, through Voice of the Martyrs God has walked us literally into their world, I mean we know them, we understand a little bit about their plight, we identify with them, we recognize their situations. That's how God brings us into the world. That's how God brings us into their world and makes us their neighbors. And God has sovereignly chosen to make Pastor Papaf and the Christian House of Prayer our neighbor.

Let me just tell you how that happened because it was not only

unique, it was miraculous and many of you might not know the whole history of how that really came about. A very good friend of mine said she had received a cassette tape from a man who used to run a trucking business and he was undertaking a ministry at that time, basically what he was doing, he was gathering up excess food and truckers and having it distributed locally in the northeast just so that people would have, there would be no wasted food, and he could distribute it to the poor. For some reason, word of his efforts got all the way across the world to the nation of India and some people from India wrote and said, "Could you help us." Well, he started ministering to India. This was many, many years ago. And he started going back and forth from here to India, and he recognized God had a role for him to serve there. And what his job was, his job was to introduce two different cultures in two different countries and to introduce them as neighbors. He started going to India as a liaison, forging relationships between North American churches and their Indian neighbors. And I say "neighbors" because this man, Court Wood, he's just -- he was a truck driver from the United States. But he was really just another Obadiah. And he went over to India, he just moved among the Dalits and the Dalits in India are the lowest possible caste, the lowest of the low. So he knew that their need made them neighbors to churches in North America. So my friend asked me if I would listen to this cassette tape. I said, "Sure, yeah, I'll

listen to it." But I have to tell you, I put very little stock in it at all, I mean, I was just doing a friend a favor. So I said, "Sure, yeah, give me the tape, I'll listen to it." Well, there's no question in my mind that God took it from there forward. I remember I just put the tape in the machine and I remember I was -- I was doing something else, I just put it on, I was transfixed from the moment the man started speaking. God just kind of grabbed me by the throat and said, "Listen to what he's saying." It was impressed on my mind deeply that this was a ministry that God wanted us to be involved in, but I didn't want to just go charging into this and say this is what we need to do, and so I took the tape and I gave it to every one of the elders. I said, "You need to listen to this and tell me what you think." Well, the effect was identical among every one of the elders. We were all identically moved by what God was telling us on this tape. And so we invited Court Wood who has since gone on to be with the Lord, marvelous, marvelous saint, we invited him up here to speak to the church and tell us about what it was all about. And when he came and he spoke, the effect extended to the entire body of Christ in this church. So what I'm saying is what God did there was he stamped his will so thoroughly on this ministry that we took it up. And what God was actually saying to Grace Fellowship in Port Jervis, New York was I want you to meet your new neighbors in Ambajipeta, India. And by doing that, you know what he's done?

He's made us responsible for them in the very same way that Obadiah made himself responsible for those hundreds. These are people that we are required by God to look after physically like Obadiah did. And it was only after I actually went to India that I saw the depth of their faith and commitment in spite of overwhelming poverty, in spite of overwhelming disease, that I realized how patriarchal and condescending I had been, thinking we were the ones offering a life line to them. You know, they offered us prayer and fasting and a commitment to community and worship that made us look sad in comparison, and we offered them money. But they were desperate. They were desperately in need and they needed the -- just the means to survive, and physical resources were something that we could supply. You see, God loves both of our churches beyond measure and he saw the beauty of combining our material wealth with their spiritual wealth, and thus our partnership was forged. And so we support them in their often times desperate need of food, clothing, medicine, and shelter. And you probably have already heard that they've once again been devastated by yet another cyclone. And you know, I've heard people say this a number of times, why does this always happen to these people? And what they don't realize is that these people still occupy the lowest rung there is in India. They're the lowest of the low and so they live in the riskiest places there is to live. You know, people that have any resources at all can afford to move away from those places. They can't.

These are the places that often get wiped out by flood or cyclone. And so we support them with the funds that they need to survive and they support us with all night prayer meetings and a continual lifting up of our needs as a church. In fact, they have much to teach us about faith and prayer and trust and we have much that we can share with them in terms of theology, doctrine, and material aid. And it's an ongoing thing.

But you got to understand, you see, the answer to the question who we are responsible for, well that's something that God pointed out to us. It's unique to us, we're responsible for CPH. See, God does this in a unique and individual way, not just for churches but for each of us individually. For Obadiah it's a hundred prophets hidden in a cave. For you and me it might be our literal next-door neighbor. You know, God brings us into each of these lives of folks that will become our neighbors based on their need and our ability to meet that need. You know, they may live next door or they may be absolutely on the other side of the world. They're somebody that God providentially causes you to connect with. And they may be friends, they may be enemies, they may be co-workers, they may be relatives, they even may be your foot doctor.

I mentioned last week that, you know, I broke this bone in my foot, and it gave me an opportunity to share the gospel with my foot

doctor and I had an appointment on Friday, and so I spent part of the time that I was going to that appointment just praying, asking God for an opportunity. I didn't get it. He was in a big hurry. But in the brief conversation that I had, I learned some more information about a need that he had that might enable me in the future to have that opportunity. You see, I know he is my neighbor because I know for a fact that he has one glaring need, and it's the need that everybody else in this world has, and that's a need for the gospel.

Here's a question. Does God hold you and I responsible for those people that he has sovereignly caused to come across our path? The answer is he does. Another question. Does that mean that God is limited by how well we respond? Answer: He is not. God will never be up in heaven biting his nails hoping that we somehow can get up the gumption to share the gospel with somebody. I mean his sovereignty will never allow anyone's eternal soul to be subject to the vagaries of sinful human experience. If he wants the gospel to get to somebody and I don't do it, well he's just going to raise up somebody else. But make no mistake about it, he will still hold me responsible. Listen to what God says in *Ezekiel 3:18*. He says: *If I say to the wicked, "You shall surely die," and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity,*

but his blood I will require at your hand. Those are terrifying words, but I didn't say them; God said them. And lest you think this is merely some ancient Old Testament curse, fast forward to the end of Paul's ministry in the book of Acts and listen to what he says in *Acts 20:26*. He's at the very end of his ministry and he says this to those who are surrounding him. He says: *"Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God."* I mean, I don't know that I fully grasp what God is saying here but I do know this, this is very serious stuff. Part of my responsibility before God is telling you that God will hold you responsible yourself. To know God has made you responsible for someone and to ignore that responsibility is sin, and I know that because I've sinned that way myself. God had convicted me of my cowardness or my laziness and my irresponsibility and he picked me up and he dusted me off and he pushed me right back in.

So let me ask this question again slightly differently. Does God hold you and I responsible for those people he has sovereignly caused to come across our path? And let me answer that question with another question: Do you think Jesus would have held the priest and the Levite responsible for walking past their beaten and bloodied neighbor? Do you think God would have held Obadiah responsible for ignoring the hundred prophets that he fed and

protected? We have the greatest privilege a human being has ever been given. The king of the universe took on flesh and he lived out his life perfectly, then he took his life to the cross where he substituted his righteousness for our sin. Every one of us was utterly lost. Doomed. Every one of us was on our way to hell. And he rescued us. And he blessed us more abundantly than almost anybody on this entire planet in the history of this planet. But the reason why God blesses anyone is so that he can in turn bless someone else. Jesus said: *"To whom much is given of him much is expected."* We haven't just been given much, we have been given all God has to give. So does God not have a right to expect us to bless others with what he's blessed us?

I'd like to say that Obadiah was a hero because he took great risks, he gave up his resources, and he took full responsibility for one hundred of God's people. But a hero is someone who does something extraordinary. According to Jesus, Obadiah was just doing his job. Listen to what Jesus had to say about that, about the work that he's called us to do, and this is *Luke 17:7*. He says: *"Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at table'? Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank the*

servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty." See, Obadiah just did what was his duty and he did it extremely well. But God's not going to blow trumpets for him because he was just doing his job. Instead he will tell him, "Well done, good and faithful servant." And in the end when it comes to risks, resources, and responsibility, that's all God requires of all of us. Let's pray.

Father, I just, I thank you for these little nobody stories that are buried in scripture. I thank you for Obadiah. I thank you for the risks that he took. I thank you for the resources that he placed at your feet, and for the responsibility that he took for one hundred of your servants. Lord, he is a model for us. I pray that you would speak through him to us and that you would give us the ability to do that very same thing, to take risks in this culture, to place our resources at your feet and for us to take responsibility for those people you've sovereignly brought in our path. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.