

[\[Mallory Holtman/Sarah Tucholsky video\]](#)

Stories like this inspire us. We love people like Mallory Holtman, in part because even in the world of sports we see it so infrequently. Holtman chose to do the right thing, to help Tucholsky get her homerun, even though it put her team's win - and playoff future in jeopardy.

Holtman does what we all wish we would do, but what few of us actually do - she does the right thing even though it'll cost her dearly. She helps her enemy, looking past the artificial divisions (in this case, sports teams), to affirm her enemy's shared humanity.

This is so admirable because it's so rare. For every human, positive response to tragedy, we know of so many despicable, cruel responses. Tragedy often becomes a fertile ground for exploitation. Almost exactly 8 years ago, I headed down to New Orleans with a group of friends. It was less than a year after Hurricane Katrina had devastated the city, and we wanted to help. We spent a week gutting houses - many of the homes in New Orleans had sat underwater for almost three weeks. The process of restoring the homes was involved - you had to get everything out of the house and strip the walls down to the studs and floors down to the baseboards. (That's what we did.) After that, you had to hire a company to cover your house with a tent and spray all the molding boards with a bleach treatment. After that two-week process, you can rebuild your house and buy all new stuff and move back in. [\[I can find some pics of this\]](#)

Obviously, the vast majority of the displaced citizens needed help with all that - that's why our group along with thousands of others went down to volunteer.

But we weren't the only groups who went down. Plenty of opportunists went to New Orleans as well. They advertised any of these services - the gutting, the bleaching or the rebuilding. They set a price - demanded half up front and half when they were done.

Then they'd take the money - in cash of course - and vanish. Move on to the next unsuspecting victim.

During our time in New Orleans, we learned there were dozens of these con artists down there. We met people who'd lost everything. Or rather, almost everything. Because what little they had left, the scraps they were using to rebuild their homes, were stolen from them by these snakes.

Doesn't that make you mad? When you see suffering exploited like that? When you see one human being taking advantage of another like that?

What's the difference between a Mallory Holtman and a crooked contractor? It's not just that one is sports, which matters so much less than the devastation left in Katrina's wake. We can't imagine a person like Holtman ever cheating people in New Orleans. It's similarly difficult to imagine one of those crooked contractors acting with such sportsmanship.

The difference isn't the setting, but the character of the person. Which raises an important question for us:

[\[a splitscreen profile\]](#) Which am I? Am I a sportsman or an exploiter? Because if I'm honest with myself, I recognize that impulse to rejoice in the suffering of others. I don't exploit national tragedies, but there

are people I don't like. People I think of as enemies. Or frenemies. Or just people I'd rather not ever be in the same room with again. And when they experience tragedy, I'm not too broken up.

The Germans came up with a word for this feeling - *schadenfreude*. It means literally a shameful happiness. Schadenfreude is the glee we often feel when witnessing the misfortune of others. And I'm willing to bet that while few if any of us have ever exploited a national tragedy, we've all succumbed to Schadenfreude. In big or small ways, we've all had those people in our lives. And when they've failed, when things don't go their way, we can't help but feel a little good.

Maybe they missed out on the promotion. Or their kid didn't get first this time. Their new project failed. They were betrayed by a friend.

And we can't help it - we feel glad. We don't say it out loud. We might even feel a little guilty. But we harbor a secret joy at their failure, their pain.

Or, if the Wolverines lose, maybe it's a not so secret joy.

I want to suggest to you this morning that there's a direct correlation between our tendency toward Schadenfreude and our ability to show justice and compassion in the face of tragedy. That what makes the difference between the sportsman and the exploiter is the choices we make right now, today and tomorrow and the next day. We're either becoming the kinds of persons who will perpetuate injustice or who will stand in the gap for those who're powerless. [[maybe a map with a fork in the road, leading to the 2 profiles/destinations](#)]

We see these two possibilities outlined in the book of Obadiah. Turn there with me. If you grabbed a maroon bible on the way in or out of the rack in front of you, you can find Obadiah on page XXX. And if you don't own a bible, we'd be honored for you to keep that one as a gift from us.

This summer, we're hearing from the so-called Minor Prophets. These are messengers God appointed during a tumultuous time in Israel's history. It's filled with political and religious tensions, characterized by the rise and fall of Empires, with God's people caught in the middle of all of it.

In the midst of so much turmoil and anxiety, God sends messages to comfort, challenge and encourage the people of Israel. To remind them that God and God alone can protect and provide for them. For the next three weeks, we're going to see that being found right when God appears is bound up in how we treat those around us.

[[It would be good to have a map that shows Egypt, Babylon, Israel and Edom](#)] Obadiah lived through the Babylonian Exile, one of the most traumatic and defining events in Jewish history. In the decades leading up to 586 BC, Babylon was the most powerful empire in the world, with Egypt their main rival. And who was smack between Babylon and Egypt? Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel.

The kings of Judah refused to trust God to preserve them. Instead they spend years wheeling and dealing, making alliances and buying off Babylon to keep themselves safe. Finally, Babylon got tired of Judah's unpredictable, shifting allegiances. So in 586 BC, Babylon marched on Jerusalem and conquered it. They destroyed the city and God's temple. And they forcibly relocated the Jewish elites - the nobles, priests and teachers, effectively gutting Jewish culture.

Obadiah receives his message from God shortly after this Exile. And his message is directed not to God's people, but to their neighbors the Edomites.

Israel and Edom are frenemies from way back. They're descended from twin brothers, Jacob and Esau, whose rivalry was strong enough to last down through the ages, a sort of ancient Hatfields and McCoys.

Israel and Edom have been neighbors for centuries. They have a blood tie. But, like most families, their relationship has been rocky. And according to Obadiah, when Babylon attacked Israel, Edom just stood by. Let's read together.

(By the way, Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament - there's only one chapter!)

God begins by promising Edom is in for some dark times.

The Lord says to Edom, "I will cut you down to size among the nations; you will be greatly despised. You have been deceived by your own pride because you live in a rock fortress and make your home high in the mountains. 'Who can ever reach us way up here?' you ask boastfully.

But even if you soar as high as eagles and build your nest among the stars, I will bring you crashing down," says the Lord.

"If thieves came at night and robbed you (what a disaster awaits you!), they would not take everything. Those who harvest grapes always leave a few for the poor. But your enemies will wipe you out completely! Every nook and cranny of Edom will be searched and looted. Every treasure will be found and taken.

"All your allies will turn against you. They will help to chase you from your land. They will promise you peace while plotting to deceive and destroy you. Your trusted friends will set traps for you, and you won't even know about it. At that time not a single wise person will be left in the whole land of Edom," says the Lord. -- Obadiah 2-8

We've seen these kinds of fearsome messages from other prophets so far - that when God comes, those who are wicked will face the final consequences of their choices. But what exactly has Edom done to deserve such punishment? According to God, they not only stood by and watched Babylon destroy Judah, they participated:

Because of the violence you did to your close relatives in Israel, you will be filled with shame and destroyed forever. When they were invaded, you stood aloof, refusing to help them. Foreign invaders carried off their wealth and cast lots to divide up Jerusalem, but you acted like one of Israel's enemies.

"You should not have gloated when they exiled your relatives to distant lands. You should not have rejoiced when the people of Judah suffered such misfortune. You should not have spoken arrogantly in that terrible time of trouble.

"You should not have plundered the land of Israel when they were suffering such calamity. You should not have gloated over their destruction when they were suffering such calamity. You should not have seized their wealth when they were suffering such calamity. You should not have stood at the

crossroads, killing those who tried to escape. You should not have captured the survivors and handed them over in their terrible time of trouble. -- Obadiah 10-14

Edom and Judah were rivals. Frenemies. They were family that always fought, but were still bound by blood. The Edomites and Israelites were both descendants of Abraham. But when Babylon came, Edom stood aside and allowed Judah to be destroyed, her people to be killed.

And worse, Edom exploited Judah's helplessness. While they were reeling from tragedy, the Edomites swept in, looting, plundering and killing. Like vultures, they scavenged the remains of the Jewish kingdom.

The Edomites stood aside while their Jewish siblings were destroyed. The Edomites exploited the Jewish tragedy.

And God says, you're riding high right now, convinced of your own invincibility. You think you chose the right side - throwing in your chips with the stronger, the aggressors. But the same thing that happened to Israel is going to happen to you!

Did you notice that? In God's prophecy of what's going to happen to Edom, in verses 7-8:

“All your allies will turn against you. They will help to chase you from your land. They will promise you peace while plotting to deceive and destroy you. Your trusted friends will set traps for you, and you won't even know about it. At that time not a single wise person will be left in the whole land of Edom,” says the Lord.

That's exactly what happened to Israel - Edom was one of their alleged allies that turned against them. God says, When you choose injustice, you'll receive injustice. When you choose to exploit, you'll be exploited. When you choose to stand aside, no one will help you when it's your turn.

Rather, God calls us to stand in the gap, to choose to love even our enemies, our rivals, the people we're feuding with. God calls us to embrace them as brothers and sisters, as neighbors. The same character we see in Mallory Holtman we ought to embody and extend to those we don't consider part of our circle, our people.

Why? Because this is who God is. This is what Jesus did for us. In Romans 5, Paul explains:

When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God. -- Romans 5:6-11

While we were sinners, while we were still God's enemies, God worked to rescue us. To save us from ourselves, from the choices we made to pit ourselves against God. When we spit in God's face, God continues to extend his arms in welcome, in love.

What makes the difference between a sportsman and a crook isn't the decision you make in the moment. It's The person you choose to be every day, in the small moments.

Do you think those crooked contractors that swarmed New Orleans in the wake of Katrina were honest before they arrived in Louisiana? Or is it more likely they cut corners on their jobs, fudged numbers and cheated on taxes?

And can you imagine Mallory Hartman shouting obscenities at opposing teams from her dugout earlier in the season? Refusing to shake hands after a game?

[The fork-in-the-road graphic revisited] Of course not. So too with us. We don't wait for the crisis to discover whether we'll offer aid or take advantage. We choose now to become one or the other.

Will we be Israel or Edom? Will be sportsmen or crooks? The choice isn't in the future. It's now. As a response to what Jesus has done for us.

We all have people in our lives we consider enemies. Maybe we don't use such strong language, but we're not fans of them. Choose to love them. To respond to them with grace and welcome.

The person you will become is dictated by the choices you make today. So choose today to be a Mallory Holtman. Choose to be a beacon of hope, of love. Choose to be a picture of God because you love your enemies. You don't rejoice at their pain. You love them in real, tangible ways.

Communion Set-Up

[Communion Slide] I know that's hard. If it were easy, everyone would do it. Choosing to love your enemies is something we can only do because of what God has done for us. We begin by acknowledging that Jesus' death and resurrection have freed us to become saints rather than sinners. Jesus' work on the Cross, and the Holy Spirit working in our lives enables us to choose to be sportsmen. To say no to schadenfreude, to work against injustice wherever we find it.

So before we contemplate our next steps today, we approach Jesus' Table. The Communion meal reminds us what Jesus has done for us. This meal offers us grace, helps us to become the kinds of people who stand against injustice, to speak out for those who can't speak out for themselves.

This ritual recalls the night before Jesus died, when he met with his disciples. He took bread, broke it and gave it to them to represent his body, broken for our sinfulness. We take wafers to remember that we made ourselves to be sinners, enemies of God. Later in the meal, Jesus gave his followers a cup of wine to represent his blood, spilled in a new covenant with God. We dip our wafers in grape juice to remember that only through Jesus' death and resurrection can we find the freedom to become like God.

As we've been talking today, I'm confident you've thought of someone you don't love. Someone you'd rather not hang out with. Someone who's your enemy. How can you show them love this week? How can you step outside your comfort zone and serve them?

In a few moments, I'm going to pray. And then you're invited to come forward to receive Jesus' meal. But before you come, commit to loving that person the way God has loved you. Commit to a concrete act of service you can offer that person. A tangible representation of God's love you can show.

Let this communion be more for you than a wafer and some juice. Let it encourage and challenge you to imitate God. To walk the path away from Edom, toward God.

You don't have to be a member here to receive Jesus' meal. If you are willing to say Yes to the life God calls you to, willing to walk the difficult path of loving your enemies, of welcoming those you'd rather exclude, then you're welcome to come to Jesus' table.

Let's pray, and then you are invited to come to Jesus' table as you feel ready.

Benediction

Before we go, I want to say to our guests...

Now, please stand.