

How to Accept the Downfall of Somebody Else

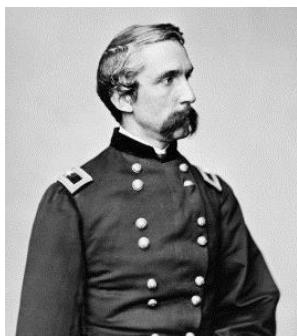
Don't you just love it when your adversary, that thorn in your side, or even just that obnoxious co-worker gets put in his place? It doesn't even have to be someone you personally know. It could be someone in the media—someone on the other side of the political aisle—who gets humiliated and knocked down a notch or two.

YES!

We'd throw a fist in the air in triumph, but we're Christians and Christians don't gloat with their fists in the air. Or do they?



Let's admit it. We do feel an air of triumph when an enemy gets knocked down—but it's not right. I was humbled and convicted by the account of Joshua Chamberlain, who did quite the opposite.



Joshua Chamberlain was a major general with the Union during the Civil War. Chamberlain was a seriously good general, and he is most well known as a hero at Gettysburg. I don't want to diminish that, but I think the greater feat of his life came at the end of the war. The very end of the war.

General Chamberlain was at the Battle of Appomattox Courthouse when Robert E. Lee surrendered. In fact, it was to Chamberlain that two Confederate soldiers approached with the announcement of Lee's unconditional surrender.

How do you end a war after four bloody years? I'm not referring to the formal surrendering process that occurred at the courthouse. I'm thinking of the mass of everyday soldiers. For the Confederates' part, they just wanted to drop their rifles and quietly head for home.

Nope. Not gonna happen. General Grant wanted something formal: one army standing before another as they laid down their arms and colors. This was a moment of victory—final victory—that could be savored. And General Chamberlain was given the charge to carry this out.

Chamberlain didn't do what was expected. He didn't see the defeated as Confederates; he saw them as Americans. And he showed them grace and honor.

In front of the defeated Confederates, Chamberlain stood at attention and ordered his men to "carry arms." This was fully understood as a salute of honor to the fallen foes. No jaunts. No jeers. No "neener-neener." Chamberlain led his men to show honor.



That moves me. Our natural tendency is to gloat. *I was right and now you know it. Eat your humble pie. This just shows I'm better than you.*

Where did Chamberlain get such character? He was a committed follower of Christ. He was a theologian, having studied for three years at Bangor Theological Seminary. He carried a spiritual sensitivity with him, even into battle. I can't help but imagine that, at this moment of surrender, certain passages played in his head:

- *"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.... Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:27-28,31).*
- *"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.... If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:17-18,20-21).*

Lord, we could use a few more Joshua Chamberlains these days on the talk shows and in social media. We need to see more grace toward those we've disagreed with and fought with. And since you need somewhere to start, start with me. Make me a man of grace and kindness.

Even to that really annoying guy.