

Judges | When All Hell Breaks Loose

The Levite's Concubine (4LT)

Judges 19.30-20.13; 21.25

11.24.19

All who saw it said, "Nothing like this has ever happened or been seen from the day when the sons of Israel came up from the land of Egypt to this day. Consider it, take counsel and speak up!"

Then all the sons of Israel from Dan to Beersheba, including the land of Gilead, came out, and the congregation assembled as one man to the LORD at Mizpah. ² And the chiefs of all the people, even of all the tribes of Israel, took their stand in the assembly of the people of God, 400,000 foot soldiers who drew the sword. ³ (Now the sons of Benjamin heard that the sons of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.) And the sons of Israel said, "Tell us, how did this wickedness take place?" ⁴ So the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, "I came with my concubine to spend the night at Gibeah which belongs to Benjamin. ⁵ "But the men of Gibeah rose up against me and surrounded the house at night because of me. They intended to kill me; instead, they ravished my concubine so that she died. ⁶ "And I took hold of my concubine and cut her in pieces and sent her throughout the land of Israel's inheritance; for they have committed a lewd and disgraceful act in Israel. ⁷ "Behold, all you sons of Israel, give your advice and counsel here."

⁸ Then all the people arose as one man, saying, "Not one of us will go to his tent, nor will any of us return to his house. ⁹ "But now this is the thing which we will do to Gibeah; we will go up against it by lot. ¹⁰ "And we will take 10 men out of 100 throughout the tribes of Israel, and 100 out of 1,000, and 1,000 out of 10,000 to supply food for the people, that when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin, they may punish them for all the disgraceful acts that they have committed in Israel." ¹¹ Thus all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, united as one man.

¹² Then the tribes of Israel sent men through the entire tribe of Benjamin, saying, "What is this wickedness that has taken place among you? ¹³ "Now then, deliver up the men, the worthless fellows in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and remove this wickedness from Israel." But the sons of Benjamin would not listen to the voice of their brothers, the sons of Israel.

21.25 In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

We come now to the very end of our series in the Book of Judges... the final words of the book sum up this whole period of Israel's history: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." (21.25)

It'd be wonderful if those words meant that no one needed a government or any external authority to force him to do right – every person JUST did the right thing on his/her own initiative... BUT, we all know: the context won't allow that interpretation.

The truth is – this was a time of complete moral relativism and the Nation/Church of Israel spiraling down and disintegrating...and today they hit bottom.

It's a bizarre string of episodes... I think this is the second most horrific scene in the entire Bible (more on that in a few minutes). Most people don't know it's even IN the Bible.

I'm going to try to go kind of "PG" in my explanation of it but even so you may wonder why we're even discussing it – what profit IS there in looking at these extreme cases of violence and sexual assault – WHY are these things even IN the Bible? ("I thought people read the Bible for comfort and peace and help!")

So let's ask those questions about these awful events:

- 1) WHAT'S the UGLY scene?
- 2) WHY the UGLY scene?
- 3) WHAT'S THE USE looking at the UGLY scene?

This is a kind of replay of the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative from Genesis CH 19. But THIS time the offenders are NOT pagan/Canaanites but the Church and the book that BEGAN with the Israelites driving the Canaanites out of the Land now ends with the Israelites "CANAANIZED" indistinguishable from or even WORSE than their pagan neighbors.

The scene begins with a Levite (maybe the same one we met last week – Micah's Levite) and this man of the priestly tribe (those who were to represent the people to God) the Levite has a concubine, which was sometimes like a mistress but more likely a poor woman who brought no dowry into the marriage.

The Greek version, which is favored by several English translations, says she became angry with the Levite and returned to her father's house in Bethlehem ...and then four months later the Levite goes to get her.

The girl brings the Levite into her father's house; her father is glad to see the Levite and detains him with bread (Bethlehem is the House of Bread) and each time the couple gets up to leave, the father says, "What's the rush? Stay and celebrate, eat and drink!"

Finally, after the fifth day of making merry with his father-in-law, the Levite and his concubine leave but it's late in the day and they don't get far. They consider staying in Jebus (later "Jerusalem") but it's a pagan town and the holy-man says, "No way! Pagans are dangerous – we're gonna stay with good Israelites!" So they go to an Israelite town called Gibeah and this old man takes them in... and that's when it goes Sodom and Gomorrah! A mob shows up and wants to violently and sexually assault the Levite. It's the worst possible perversion of the hospitality-code but the "worthless fellows" are...pounding at the door.

So the Levite pushes his concubine out the door and she is abused to death. (BTW, when the Levite later recounts the story [5] he leaves out that HE was the one who sacrificed her to the violent perverse mob.)

The Levite finds her in the morning with her cold hands on the threshold of the house (pitiful!). He takes her home and dismembers her body and sends one piece to each tribe in Israel (apparently with some sort of message and a call to arms).

The tribes are appalled by the sight of this, “Nothing like this has ever happened in Israel! CONSIDER IT, TAKE COUNSEL AND SPEAK UP!”

Then all the tribes conscript an army and supplies and they confront the tribe of Benjamin: “Give us the scoundrels responsible for this travesty – they will face the death penalty... BUT THE sons of Benjamin would listen to the voice of their brothers” – they defend the perverted murderers.

And what ensues is a strange series of civil war battles. Shockingly, Benjamin wins the first two battles (maybe God is testing Israel’s resolve or their faith – IDK!) But finally the Israelites prevail and almost completely eradicate the Tribe of Benjamin...

Then, they feel sorry for Benjamin... And in order to preserve the tribe from extinction the Israelites kidnap all these Israelite women and they completely destroy a whole town in the process. And it’s this weird patchwork of misplaced mercy and overblown justice... mainly at the expense of women and children (21.10) and the elderly (19.16).

And then the book ends with the sad refrain we’ve heard before (17.6; 18.1; 19.1 and 21.25) – “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

You read this final section (and I left out a lot of details – but it’s only more of the same) and you have this sense that humanity is really, deeply broken. And this is the Church.

It’s a raw, unvarnished, unadorned, realistic picture of what happens when the Church turns away from the Law and the Gospel... when the Church forgets its God-given history, its origins, its narrative, and its destiny. Basically, this is the Church without God.

It’s not that God is absent – He was directing them to exact justice on their own family, on the Tribe of Benjamin. That tribe had so rejected God and had so redefined right and wrong that they were willing to go to war to defend the criminals, the most extreme kind of brutality and sexualized violence.

I want to say it was animalistic but that would be an insult to animals.

God was there... but the Church had so forgotten how to relate to Him. They forgot that He, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was different from the idols of their neighbors. He was the God who had spoken the worlds into existence and He was the God who had chosen them as His UNIQUE PEOPLE, the one nation that God founded as His own; the nation/church of Israel.

They lost touch with the truth that God had saved them NOT because they were better than the idol worshipers (remember, Abraham CAME from idol worshipers) – they were saved by grace.

The only thing that distinguishes this nation from the rest of humanity is the mysterious grace of God. And NOW, they can't ignore that: there's an indelible mark on their national history that THEY are NO BETTER THAN THE WORST OF HUMAN BEINGS.

And to THIS church today... I'm obligated to say: neither are YOU. I mean under the right conditions you might be shocked and appalled at what you could think, say and do. Put you into a situation where there's NO ACCOUNTABILITY, no one watching, no possibility of getting caught – who knows what might come out of your heart?

The great Russian thinker who was himself a Russian Orthodox Christian, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, famously wrote, "The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either -- but right through every human heart -- and through all human hearts."

And at this moment in our own history and in our own lives IT IS CRUCIALLY important for the Church to know that our righteous standing before the God who IS NOT AN IDOL, who is UNIQUE, the only true and living God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ – our standing before Him depends completely on Jesus Christ. We are living on His righteousness that we receive as a gift... NOT BASED on our hearts, our efforts, our godness but on God's grace.

Do I have this grace...have I received it by trusting in Jesus Christ? – I think I do – I believe I do but I can't really explain why "it found out me" – except that God wanted to demonstrate the beauty of His mercy in a big moral failure like ME.

I've seen a little bit into my own heart and it ain't pretty... What if I wasn't raised by loving parents... or lived in a lawless society without order or a stable government to restrain my impulses?

Why is this ugly scene IN the Bible and why are even reading it today? It's here to remind YOU that YOU cannot save yourself. We need someone to DO IT for us – we need a Substitute.

I've mentioned the Hebrew scholar who has really helped me through this year's Judges study. At the end of her great book, Laura Smit wrote these words: "Nonetheless, the concubine is the most complete Christological type in the book of Judges."

I know that sounds shocking – I'm not even sure I agree with it – but it's more than intriguing to think that she went and prepared a place for the covenant breaking Levite (who represents the people of God) she prepared a place for him in her father's house.

The father receives the bad Levite for her sake and brings him into the House of Joy – the House of Bread (Bêt-Lehem). She is the substitute and dies in place of the unfaithful Levite and then her body is broken and distributed among God's people... Which leads to the words, "Nothing like this has ever happened or been seen in Israel...Consider it, take counsel and speak up!" (19.30)

I'm reminded that those same words were spoken about the One to whom her sacrifice pointed (on a number of occasions) like when Jesus Christ forgave and healed the paralyzed man in Mark CH 2: "they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this.' "(Mark 2.12)

Or Matthew 9.33: "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel."

Her broken body pointed to His and His broken Body will fix everything that's broken.

So, how do we USE this ugly scene? What's the USE? Well, wouldn't it be great if God looked down to the bottom of you...into the deep well of your own bad motives and the potential for evil in you and LOVED YOU ANYWAY?

And if you could see and be convinced every day that God's love for you was NOT based on your performance. His forgiveness and your standing are NOT dependent on you but on the Substitute.

If we could revel and enjoy the truth that there is a Spirit inhabiting us, alluring us, convicting and conquering in us – jealous for us. It's His work and ours but to believe. Consider it, take counsel and speak up!

Lose your high opinion of yourself and go with Jack Miller's self-esteem based on grace plan: cheer up! You're worse than you think but, in the Gospel, in Christ, you are more cherished, more secure, more significant than you have ever imagined.

Don't be afraid to discover your sinfulness... to achieve low self-esteem... It may be the very thing that causes you to run to Jesus Christ (many times a day), to repent and rejoice that God's love for you is totally realistic... That the broken Body of Jesus Christ and the empty tomb are

calling to everyone who believes: YOU ARE FORGIVEN and YOUR SIN WILL NOT SEPARATE YOU FROM THE FATHER'S HOUSE OF EVERLASTING JOY.