*Jeffrey Dahmer, also known as the Milwaukee Cannibal and the Milwaukee Monster, was an American serial killer and sexual predator who committed the murder and dismemberment of 17 men and boys from 1978 to 1991.*

*In February 1994, he was interviewed by Stone Phillips from Dateline NBC. Dahmer said he believed that humanity was on earth by purely natural causes and that death ended everything. He said that if there was no God, then why should he modify his behavior? Why shouldn’t he kill and cannibalize his victims?*

When we live as if there is no God, when we disregard the values that are found in God’s character and from His Word, there is no limit to just how low we can go as a people.

This morning we are going to look at an example of where it appears that God’s people had reached an all-time low. We will be in **Judges 19**, and if you know anything about the story in Chapter 19, you know the story is very tragic. It’s one of the most disturbing stories in the entire Bible, so much so that the commentator F.B. Meyer recommended not reading it. I do understand his recommendation because it is so terrible, but I also appreciate the fact that the Bible reflects the lives of real people – the good, and the bad, and the very ugly. I am also reminded in **2 Timothy 3:16** that all Scripture is inspired by God and it is profitable for us, so with that promise in mind, we are going to press on with some caution.

Let’s begin with the first three verses of Chapter 19.

**1Now it came about in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite staying in the remote part of the hill country of Ephraim, who took a concubine for himself from Bethlehem in Judah. 2But his concubine played the harlot against him, and she went away from him to her father’s house in Bethlehem in Judah, and was there for a period of four months. 3Then her husband arose and went after her to speak tenderly to her in order to bring her back, taking with him his servant and a pair of donkeys. So, she brought him into her father’s house, and when the girl’s father saw him, he was glad to meet him.**

Once again, the writer tells a story about a Levite, but this is not the same one from last week. This Levite lived somewhere in the hill country of Ephraim, and instead of being faithful to one wife, he had taken a concubine from Bethlehem. Now just so you know, a concubine is a woman who is lawfully united to a man, but in a relationship that is inferior to that of a wife. We could say she is a legal mistress, and many prominent men in the Old Testament had concubines; however, this was not God’s desire, and these men experienced more than their share of trouble and strife in their families as a result of taking on concubines.

Now we are told this concubine was apparently unhappy in the relationship, and she became unfaithful to the Levite. As a result, he sends her packing, and she returns to the home of her father. After four months of separation, I guess the Levite missed her, so he travels to Bethlehem to sweet talkher into returning home with him.

Well, the father-in-law was delighted to see the Levite and was happy about this turn of events that involved his daughter, and he insisted that the Levite stay and accept his hospitality. The Levite agreed and, after a three-day celebration of eating and drinking, the Levite prepared to leave. The father-in-law urged him to stay for yet another meal and then for another night. On the morning of the fifth day, the father-in-law persuaded the Levite to stay until the afternoon and then tried to get him to stay yet another night. At this point the Levite probably realized he needed to get out while the getting was good, so the Levite, his servant, and the concubine set out late in the afternoon and traveled toward Jebus. Jebus is also Jerusalem, only at this point in time it is controlled by the Jebusites, rather than the Israelites.

Okay, let’s drop down to verse 11.

**11When they were near Jebus, the day was almost gone; and the servant said to his master, “Please come, and let us turn aside into this city of the Jebusites and spend the night in it.” 12However, his master said to him, “We will not turn aside into the city of foreigners who are not of the sons of Israel; but we will go on as far as Gibeah.” 13He said to his servant, “Come and let us approach one of these places; and we will spend the night in Gibeah** **or Ramah.” 14So they passed along and went their way, and the sun set on them near Gibeah which belongs to Benjamin.**

They had traveled about five miles, and it was already late in the day when the three of them approached Jebus. The Levite’s servant suggested that they spend the night there, but the Levite was unwilling to stay the night in a foreign city – possibly for safety reasons. He wanted to reach an Israelite town to be with his own people, so he chose to press on until they reached Gibeah or Ramah, and this required another five or so miles of traveling.

**15They turned aside there in order to enter and lodge in Gibeah. When they entered, they sat down in the open square of the city, for no one took them into his house to spend the night.**

The sun was beginning to set as they reached the Benjamite city of Gibeah. They entered the city gates and seated themselves in the town square. The town square was an open area just inside the city gate, and it was a logical place for visitors to wait. Since there were no motels, it was the custom for visitors who were traveling and needed a place to spend the night, to hang out in the square and wait for an invitation to stay the night with someone from the town. This kind of hospitality was absolutely expected in that culture – but surprisingly no one invited them in. So, they waited.

As darkness fell, an old man came in from his work in the field, and he saw the Levite and his companions and asked where they had come from and where they were going. The Levite explained their situation and the old man strongly insisted that they get out of the town square and stay with him for the night. Apparently, the old man knew something they did not know.

**22While they were celebrating, behold, the men of the city, certain worthless fellows, surrounded the house, pounding the door; and they spoke to the owner of the house, the old man, saying, “Bring out the man who came into your house that we may have relations with him.” 23Then the man, the owner of the house, went out to them and said to them, “No, my fellows, please do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not commit this act of folly.**

While they were relaxing, men from the city beat on the door, they hurled themselves at the door, and demanded that the Levite be sent out so that they could have sex with him. The old man told the mob not to do such a horrible thing because the Levite was his guest. In that culture, hospitality was almost considered sacred, and so the old man felt a deep sense of responsibility to protect his main guest – the Levite.

And then the story becomes eerily familiar to the story of Sodom in **Genesis 19** as the old man says, beginning with **verse 24**…

**24Here is my virgin daughter and his concubine. Please let me bring them out that you may ravish them and do to them whatever you wish. But do not commit such an act of folly against this man.” 25But the men would not listen to him. So, the man seized his concubine and brought her out to them; and they raped her and abused her all night until morning, then let her go at the approach of dawn. 26As the day began to dawn, the woman came and fell down at the doorway of the man’s house where her master was, until full daylight.**

This is horrible on so many levels that I don’t even know where to begin. I am not going to explain this passage any further, as the picture is pretty clear. I also want to apologize if I have re-traumatized someone who has experienced some form of sexual assault in the past. It was not my intent, but it is important to the story.

I also want to say something else before we move on. This is not a *“Thus saith the Lord”* comment – it’s just my opinion. Call me old fashioned, but I was raised that if danger is coming, if someone has to take a bullet – don’t let it be taken by women and children. As a man, you face the danger. You stand in the gap between the wicked and those who are weaker than you. Right or wrong – that’s just my two cents.

**27When her master arose in the morning and opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way, then behold, his concubine was lying at the doorway of the house with her hands on the threshold. 28He said to her, “Get up and let us go,” but there was no answer. Then he placed her on the donkey; and the man arose and went to his home.**

**When her master arose in the morning** – let’s stop there for a moment because I don’t want to gloss over this. *I don’t like this Levite, and now I really don’t like this guy – at all.*  While his concubine was undergoing this horrible ordeal throughout the night, he was able to get a good night’s sleep. Who does that? In my opinion, that is depraved indifference and that’s worse than hatred. But he’s not done.

In the morning, after his good night’s sleep, the Levite opens the door of the house and notices his concubine lying on the ground with her hands on the threshold of the door – she had almost made it to safety. This Levite, who was now ready to leave, orders her to get up so they can hit the road – but there is no reply or response from her. *Did I tell you I don’t like this guy?* And while the passage does not tell us, I suspect she was dead, and so the Levite loaded his concubine on the donkey to take her to his home.

What happens next is even more shocking. Look at **verse 29**.

**When he entered his house, he took a knife and laid hold of his concubine and cut her in twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout the territory of Israel.**

Once safely home the Levite cuts the dead body of his concubine into twelve pieces, sending a portion to every Israelite tribe.  This could be the most gruesome story ever related in the Bible, but why is it here? Look at **verse 30**:

**“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!”**

This experience painted a picture of just how low the children of Israel could go when God is dismissed – and the shock of seeing the woman’s dismembered body and hearing the story sent tremendous ripples throughout the land. It was a serious wake-up call to God’s people, and there would be massive repercussions. We will talk about that next week.

The Apostle Paul also painted a picture of a people who dismiss God, who live their lives as if God does not exist. Turn with me to **Romans 1**, and follow along as I start with **verse 18**. As I read, you will see for yourself that what Paul said here was relevant back in the time of Judges, it was relevant for the people in Paul’s time, and it’s relevant for us today.

***18For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.***

***24Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. 25For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.***

***26For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.***

***28And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, 29being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, 30slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; 32and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.***

In this passage, Paul described people who claimed to see clearly, who thought they were wise, who had made gods in their own image, who misdirected their affections, who did what was right in their own eyes, and yet, they missed the truth that was so plainly evident to them – there is a Holy God.

If you noticed in Romans, Paul began by stating that the “***Wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men”*** and then on three occasions Paul said that ***“God gave them over.”*** What does it mean for God to give someone over? Well, first it does not mean that God has given up on saving people. That would not be consistent with the truth of the Gospel.

Instead, in God’s wrath and in His abundant grace, which together seems like a paradox – God may permit people to continue in their sins, to do what they want, and to follow the evil desires of their hearts, so that the consequences of their sin – what they reap, will catch up to them – which in the long run may be a part of their salvation process.

Isn’t this what happened to Samson in the end? He had to suffer the consequences of being blinded, being bound in chains, and humiliated by his enemies before he genuinely acknowledged the Sovereign God in his life.

And isn’t this what happened to the prodigal son where he was allowed to lose it all in his wild living before he finally came to his senses and returned to his father? Many times, those who reap the consequences of their sin, those who come to the very end of their rope and come to the end of themselves, are the ones who consider Jesus Christ.

Now you might ask, “*Why doesn’t God just stop the madness?” “Why doesn’t He just do away with evil people – like those men from Gibeah in* ***Judges 19****?”*

God could, but I would also say, *“Be careful what you ask for.”* We might focus on sin like we saw committed by the men of Gibeah or even by the Levite, but what about the lie you told last week? What about the lust in your eyes yesterday? What about your judgmental heart? What about the gossip you spread at work? Do I need to continue?

The point is, if God really stopped all the evil out there, we would all be crying for mercy. We can’t “cherry pick” sin. It’s all evil in the eyes of a Holy God and all evil is worthy of His righteous wrath, which brings me to my last point.

Look at the last verse in **Romans 1** again. It reads, ***“And although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.”***

If the book of Romans was to end right here at **verse 32**, we would all be in terrible trouble, without any hope for any of us. We have all offended God in some manner, we have all rebelled against Him, we are as guilty as guilty can be – every one of us, without exception.

But fortunately for us, the book of Romans does not stop at **verse 32**, and if we continue on to passages like **Romans 5:8**, we learn that Jesus came for the very people mentioned in **Romans 1**, and yes, even people like those men in Gibeah.

Paul said: **“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”**

At our lowest, at our very worst – loved moved first. He didn’t wait. God acted first and gave His Son as a sacrifice for us. In our hopeless and helpless state, Jesus paid off our sin debt in full, He freely provided forgiveness for those who would receive it, and He brought us into a right standing with a Holy God.

I want to close with a quote from Tim Keller and he says, *“Here’s the gospel: You’re more sinful than you ever dared believe; you’re more loved than you ever dared hope.”*

Source Material:

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Constable Notes