*There was a new family that had just moved into town. Their son came to Sunday School but he seemed upset, so his teacher asked him if anything was wrong.*

*The boy replied that he had hoped to go fishing that morning, but his dad told him that he needed to go to church instead. The teacher was very impressed with the dad’s dedication and asked the boy if his dad had explained to him why it was more important to go to church than to go fishing.*

*The boy replied, "Yes he did. My dad said that he didn't have enough bait for both of us."*

I guess hypocrisy can be funny – until it’s not – funny. This morning we are going to work our way through the last two chapters of the Book of Judges, and in these chapters, we are going to see moments of hypocrisy by God’s people that are really hard to comprehend.

If you recall from last week, a Levite and his concubine spent the night in the Benjamite city of Gibeah. While there, the wicked men of the city wanted to have sex with the Levite; however, this Levite – who was a poor excuse for a man in my opinion, physically tossed his concubine out to these wicked men and they raped her throughout the night until she died.

In the morning, after waking from a good night’s sleep, the Levite found the body of his concubine lying at the foot of the door, so he took her body home and cut her up into 12 pieces – sending her body parts to the leaders of the 12 tribes of Israel. As you might imagine it was a terrible shock to receive a body part and to hear what had happened, and as a result, it prompted a swift response by the tribes.

This was a very tragic story – but the tragedy continues. If you have your Bibles, turn to **Judges 20** beginning with **verse 1**.

**1Then 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. 2The 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?” 4So 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. 5But 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. 6And 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. 7Behold, all you sons of Israel, give your advice and counsel here.”**

We are told the Israelites, with the exception of the tribe of Benjamin, gathered at the village of Mizpah, and this mass gathering of 400,000 soldiers gives us some kind of idea of their outrage. So, when they were gathered together, the Levite was invited by the tribal leaders to tell his story, and he gave a Reader’s Digest version of what had happened – failing to mention that he saved his own skin by forcing his concubine out the door to be ravaged by the mob all night. *I’m sure it was an honest mistake that he forgot to mention that little itty-bitty piece of the story.*

Anyway, the tribal leaders reached their verdict and they vowed not to return home until the wicked men of Gibeah got what they deserved – death. V**erse 12**.

**12Then the tribes of Israel sent men through the entire tribe of Benjamin, saying, “What is this wickedness that has taken place among you? 13Now 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.**

The other tribes of Israel sent messengers to the tribe of Benjamin asking that they deliver up the wicked men of Gibeah who committed this horrible act. To their credit, they sought to resolve this crisis without a civil war, but the tribe of Benjamin refused to hand these men over – instead, they mustered their army of 26,000 soldiers at Gibeah to face their Israelite brothers, who had a much larger force of 400,000 soldiers.

So, after inquiring of the Lord – even though they had already made up their minds, the Israelites attacked the Benjamites, and on the first day, the Israelites lost 22,000 soldiers. I doubt no one saw that coming. And then on the second day, they resumed their plans and they lost another 18,000. That’s a total loss of 40,000 soldiers. The Israelites had expected to easily defeat the much smaller Benjamite army, but that did not prove to be the case, and the Israelites were demoralized.

* What has Old Testament history told us when Israel lost a battle they should have easily won? There is sin in the camp. Do you remember the Battle of Ai and the sin of Achan in **Joshua 7?**

God allowed these two defeats to humble the entire nation of Israel. They had to realize that the terrible crime at Gibeah was not merely the result of the sin by some wicked men, or of one city, or even a tribe. Israel had to see that as a nation, they had a sin problem, they were a people who did what was right in their own eyes, and they all needed to get serious with the Lord – and that’s what they did.

**26Then all the sons of Israel and all the people went up and came to Bethel and wept; thus they remained there before the Lord and fasted that day until evening. And they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. 27The sons of Israel inquired of the Lord (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, 28and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, Aaron’s son, stood before it to minister in those days), saying, “Shall I yet again go out to battle against the sons of my brother Benjamin, or shall I cease?” And the Lord said, “Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand.”**

Israel finally repented of their sin. They presented themselves before the Lord; they wept and fasted, and they gave burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the Lord. And for the first time in the Book of Judges, the Ark of the Covenant is mentioned, as well as Phinehas the grandson of Aaron. Again, they inquired of the Lord, and this time, His Word contained marching orders and a promise of victory.

So, the Israelites set up an ambush around Gibeah – a strategy once used by Joshua against Ai, and here’s what happened. A portion of the Israelites made a half-hearted attack against the Benjamites losing a few men in the process, then they retreated like cowards – enticing the Benjamite army to leave Gibeah and chase after them to give them another beating just like before. But after drawing the army away from Gibeah, the Israelites who were in hiding, attacked the city and set it on fire. The Israelites then turned on the Benjamite army and killed all of them except for 600 men who escaped. The Israelites finally got their victory.

Unfortunately, it didn’t stop there. They continued in their rampage and utterly destroyed the other Benjamite towns as well – killing everyone and everything in sight, setting all of their towns on fire. When the dust finally settled, the only thing left of the tribe of Benjamin was the 600 men in hiding. That’s it – nothing else.

Here’s the irony. The Israelites were commanded by God to utterly destroy the pagan inhabitants of the Promised Land – but we know they did not obey God. But here, out of rage and vengeance – outside of the will of God, they utterly destroyed one of their own tribes – their own people. Eventually, they realized what they had done, and this leads us to **Chapter 21, verse 1**.

**1Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpah, saying, “None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin in marriage.” 2So the people came to Bethel and sat there before God until evening, and lifted up their voices and wept bitterly. 3They said, “****Why, O Lord, God of Israel, has this come about in Israel, so that one tribe should be missing today in Israel?” 4It came about the next day that the people arose early and built an altar there and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.**

So, we learn that something else happened in Mizpah when the tribes first gathered to hear the Levite’s story. The other tribes of Israel had made a second vow to give none of their daughters to the Benjamite men in marriage, and they aren’t going to break their vow – even though they could have.

And here is another irony. If you recall when the Israelites entered the Promised Land, they were forbidden by God to intermarry with the pagan inhabitants and they vowed to follow God’s command – but it didn’t take long for them to disobey God and do it anyway. Ironically, now the Israelites have made their own vow, a man-made vow to essentially treat the Benjamites like they were supposed to treat the pagan inhabitants and not intermarry with them. The tragedy here is that the Israelites were more faithful to their man-made vows than they were to their vows to God.

We are also told they cried out to God, almost as if it was His fault that the tribe of Benjamin was near extinction. The question, **Why, O Lord, God of Israel, has this come about in Israel, so that one tribe should be missing today in Israel?** This is so bad, it’s almost comical. They want to know from God why He has allowed their actions to cause all of this. Really – you want to blame God for your mess? Well, as you might expect, they got no answer from God, and just like we read last week in **Romans 1**, God has given them over to the consequences of their sin.

Now the rest of this chapter is just plain crazy. Look at **verse 5**.

**5Then the sons of Israel said, “Who is there among all the tribes of Israel who did not come up in the assembly to the Lord?” For they had taken a great oath concerning him who did not come up to the Lord at Mizpah, saying, “He shall surely be put to death.”**

So, we learn there was a third vow taken at Mizpah by the men of Israel. They vowed to execute anyone who did not show up to help in the battle against the tribe of Benjamin. This will make sense in a moment so just bear with me.

**6And the sons of Israel were sorry for their brother Benjamin and said, “One tribe is cut off from Israel today. 7What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since we have sworn by the Lord not to give them any of our daughters in marriage?” 8And they said, “What one is there of the tribes of Israel who did not come up to the Lord at Mizpah?” And behold, no one had come to the camp from Jabesh-gilead to the assembly. 9For when the people were numbered, behold, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead was there.**

So, here’s the problem. The tribe of Benjamin is comprised of only 600 men. No women, and the Israelites have vowed not to give their daughters in marriage to these men. There appears to be no way to continue the family line of the Benjamites.

So, the tribal leaders put their thinking caps on, and the question was asked, “*Did any tribe or clan fail to attend the gathering at Mizpah?*” When they reviewed the roll of those who had appeared, by a horrible stroke of luck they discovered that for whatever reason, and no one bothered to ask, the men from Jabesh-gilead did not show up to fight against the Benjamites. And, here’s the solution – let’s play one bad vow against the other bad vow.

They sent 12,000 soldiers to Jabesh-gilead and exterminated everyone – men, women, and children, everyone except for 400 young virgins who had just lost everything. And where do you think these 400 young virgins are going?

**13Then the whole congregation sent word and spoke to the sons of Benjamin who were at the rock of Rimmon, and proclaimed peace to them. 14Benjamin returned at that time, and they gave them the women whom they had kept alive from the women of Jabesh-gilead; yet they were not enough for them. 15And the people were sorry for Benjamin because the Lord had made a breach in the tribes of Israel. 16Then the elders of the congregation said, “What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since the women are destroyed out of Benjamin?” 17They said, “There must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, so that a tribe will not be blotted out from Israel. 18But we cannot give them wives of our daughters.” For the sons of Israel had sworn, saying, “Cursed is he who gives a wife to Benjamin.”**

So far, they have succeeded in providing 400 wives for the Benjamite men, but there still remained another 200 Benjamites who were still without wives. They concluded that something else must be done to provide wives for the remaining Benjamites so they could continue their family lines. So, they concocted yet another devious plan. The Israelite men had vowed that they would not *give* any of their daughters to the Benjamites as wives, but nothing had been said about any virgin being *taken* from among their daughters. **Verse 19**.

**19So they said, “Behold, there is a feast of the Lord from year to year in Shiloh, which is on the north side of Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and on the south side of Lebonah.” 20And they commanded the sons of Benjamin, saying, “Go and lie in wait in the vineyards, 21and watch; and behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to take part in the dances, then you shall come out of the vineyards and each of you shall catch his wife from the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the land of Benjamin. 22It shall come about, when their fathers or their brothers come to complain to us, that we shall say to them, ‘Give them to us voluntarily, because we did not take for each man of Benjamin a wife in battle, nor did you give them to them, else you would now be guilty.’” 23The sons of Benjamin did so, and took wives according to their number from those who danced, whom they carried away.**

An annual festival was soon to be celebrated by the Israelites at Shiloh, and at this celebration, there would be dancing by the virgin daughters of Shiloh. The 200 Benjamites were commanded to hide out in the vineyards, and when the Israelite virgins came near to dance, they were to kidnap them and make them their wives. And so, it happened. Each of Benjamite bachelors seized an Israelite virgin and made her his wife. Two hundred young women were *taken* not *given*, and forced into marriage.

Think about the double-standard and the hypocrisy here. How did this all begin? One Levite did not do the honorable thing and stand up for his woman. Instead, some wicked men in the city of Gibeah raped her – which resulted in her death. Her rape shocked and outraged the Israelites, and so they went to war with their Benjamite brothers, coming very close to bringing this tribe to extinction.

And now when all is said and done, the very same Israelites who were outraged by the rape of a concubine, have now forced 600 young virgins into unwanted sexual relationships – rape, and marriages with men they did not know, just so the tribal leaders could save face by not breaking their man-made vows.

How does something like this happen? **Because everyone did what was right in their own eyes and took their eyes off of the One who really mattered**. They dismissed God. God’s people ignored God’s will and they did what they wanted, when they wanted, and with whom they wanted. They disregarded God’s moral standards as seen in His character and in His Word – and they created their own moral standards – often distorted double-standards – which ultimately resulted in tragic consequences.

But there is reason for hope from this tragic story of violence, and kidnapping, and rape, and forced marriage.

Many years later, there was a Benjamite who could trace his heritage all the way back to the events in Judges. He was a man who was also on a rampage of sort – that being to stamp out Christianity with a vengeance until he found himself blinded on the road to Damascus. His name was Saul, better known to us as the Apostle Paul.

By His grace, God took the tragedy created by people and brought something good out of it. Ironically, when considering his Benjamite heritage, Paul would preach the good news of love and forgiveness and grace though Jesus Christ – and this truth is powerful and it’s transforming.

*Strangely, this is illustrated in Jeffrey Dahmer, the serial killer and sexual predator I mentioned at the beginning of my message last week. In February 1994, Dahmer had told interviewer Stone Phillips of Dateline NBC that he had no reason to change his behavior because if there was no God, there were no universal moral standards, and there would be no accountability after death. But in that same interview, Dahmer then added these words: “I have since come to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is God, and that one day I, and everyone else, will be accountable to Him.” Dahmer was murdered on November 29, 1994, by another inmate.*

This hope and transforming power from the inside/out are only found in One Person – Jesus Christ, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, and the final Judge.

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