

May 7, 2017
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Judges
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Judges 19.

1. At what point in the history of Israel did this story probably take place?
2. Was the Levite wrong to enjoy fellowship with his concubine's father?
3. Do you think it was wrong for the Levite to have a concubine? If so why?
4. Why didn't the Levite want to stay over night in Jebus?
5. How can we explain the old host's defense of a complete stranger while at the same time he offered his virgin daughter to be raped by the perverts who were trying to knock down his door?
6. Would a king have brought more order, stability, or even morality to such a wicked and perverse culture?
7. Why did God tell His people to drive the inhabitants out of the Promised Land?

SUCH A THING
Judges 19

We could almost expect that a story about the idolatry of God's people would be followed by a story of perverse sin among God's people. No one rejects God without sinking into sin. Whether it is sin like sexual perversion, lying, theft, or murder, or the sparkling clean sin of creating your own religion and traditions while rejecting God's truth, all are sin. Both extremes are the result of idolatry, which is replacing God with your own god, which is usually the matter of putting self first.

Also not surprising is that the story of Micah and the Danite idolatry and this story of perverse wickedness took place at about the same time. What is surprising is the timing when compared with the rest of the book of Judges. In the arrangement of Judges, the Samson story fell before the stories about Micah and this Levite. But Samson was actually a contemporary of Samuel (chapters 13-16). The story about the Danites moving north (chapters 17-18) actually occurred early on in the judges period probably during the time of Othniel who was the first judge (3:9-11). This event with the Benjamites and the Levite (chapter 19) also happened about the same time the Danites moved north, which put it contemporaneous with Othniel.

Having said all that, we are reminded that the book of Judges is not so much a chronological account of that period of 400 years in Israel's history as it is a description of the people's terrible spiritual condition highlighted by certain events. The people were characterized as doing what was right in their own eyes. What they considered right was vastly conflicted with the character of God that He revealed in His law. The God who Moses taught about was not even on the people's radar during much of the judges period.

The people needed a king to encourage and challenge them to do right. After 400 years of inconsistency, of a repeated cycle of sin, oppression, confession, deliverance, and back to sin, God gave His people the first of many kings. The sad story is that most of Israel's kings also did what was right in their own eyes. The kings themselves needed a king who would lead them to do right. Indeed, they needed King Jesus. For 1500 years, God was preparing His people to receive King Jesus. When He came, the people rejected Him because they insisted on doing what was right in their own eyes.

And the story has not changed for us. We must embrace Jesus as our king or sink into an abyss similar to what is described in this

very unsavory story in our text. God's immutable law is that when people reject Jesus Christ, they are destined to sink into sin. Sometimes the sin is expressed in gross perversions. Sometimes the sin is expressed in a squeaky clean religion of man's rules. Both expressions are expressions of rebellion against God which brings His wrath in one form or another. We do well to learn from the story of this text what the sewage of sin looks like with the result that we will run back to embrace King Jesus.

An Unspeakable Tragedy (vv.1-26).

Fellowship is not an indication of righteousness. Some fellowship can be counterproductive. Which is why Scripture reminds us, that light and darkness can't have fellowship. In the story before us, a Levite went to retrieve his concubine and wound up having too much fellowship. *In those days, when there was no king in Israel, a certain Levite was sojourning in the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, who took to himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah (v.1).*

That there was no king in Israel is significant. It is one of the two descriptive phrases that set the overall tone for the culture in the period of the judges: 1) "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (17:6; 21:25) and 2) "There was no king in Israel" (17:6; 21:25). By the repetition of these phrases, the writer prepares our thinking to accept the king God allowed the people to choose. Saul, the first king chosen, looked impressive like a king should look to people. But would he keep the people from doing what was right in their own eyes or would he himself do what was right in his own eyes, like earthly kings almost always do?

Again, we see the case of a Levite who was not living in a Levitical city – as was the case with the Levite Micah hired to be his priest. Here we read about a certain Levite who was living temporarily (*sojourning*) out in the sticks, in the hills of Ephraim. That would have been about twenty miles north of Jerusalem. It would have been about twenty-five miles north of Bethlehem and seventeen miles north of Gibeah. None of the four Levitical cities situated in Ephraim were in or near the remote hill country.

According to God's law, the Levites were expected to live in the Levitical cities or serve the Lord where the Ark of the Covenant was located, which would have been Shiloh, which was in Ephraim but not in the hill country (Num. 35; Deut. 18:6-7). They were also supposed to be supported by the people's tithes in order for them to serve the Lord (Num. 18). Therefore, we might decide that this Levite staying in the hill country of Ephraim was like a preacher out of God's will in our culture. These things are common in cultures that have forsaken God's Word and despised God's truth.

This particular Levite owned a concubine. That a servant of the Lord who was supposed to be busy about ministering to God's people owned a concubine only made matters worse. It is true that, among God's people, owning a concubine had become acceptable ever since the time of Abraham. A concubine was typically added as an addition who would serve as an "almost wife." The argument was that she could help add to the posterity of the man, who as in Israelite, was responsible to build the nation God promised to Abraham. That was a creative explanation for fulfilling lust. Sinful men are always creative in the way they excuse their sins.

God's plan for husband and wife is not hard to understand, universally true, and true as long as God gives the human race time on earth. In the beginning God said: "*Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh*" (Genesis 2:24). For clarity, Jesus repeated the same rule to those who questioned it: "*Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate*" (Matthew 19:4-6). That seems clear enough. God's plan does not allow for another woman to be brought into the ONE flesh union.

Such was the culture of the judges. Yes, but folks were cordial. That's a good thing, right? *And his concubine was unfaithful to him, and she went away from him to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah, and was there some four months (v.4).* This verse points out that the man's concubine had been unfaithful. The word translated *unfaithful* is literally whorish, which means to be sexually immoral,

to play the harlot. Most of the time the word speaks of the unfaithfulness of God's people as they ran after pagan, false gods. And so God did picture His people Israel as unfaithful wives who acted like harlots. Maybe the woman just went home to Dad, but the wording seems to indicate that she did worse than that. If so, the woman was a good illustration of what God saw in the Israelite nation at the time.

And like God, the husband pursued his unfaithful concubine (though God doesn't have concubines). *Then her husband arose and went after her, to speak kindly to her and bring her back. He had with him his servant and a couple of donkeys. And she brought him into her father's house. And when the girl's father saw him, he came with joy to meet him (v.3).* Notice that the husband spoke kindly. It seems that after cooling down for four months, the husband went after his wife. He kindly convinced her that she should come home. We like these "Hallmark Channel" happy endings.

The concubine brought her "husband" (more accurately, "her owner") to her father. The woman's response shows that she was not angry or too embarrassed. She looks like someone who felt forgiven. The father rejoiced. The father-in-law was delighted to see the girl's "Master?". We cannot forget that the man really wasn't her husband. This was actually a very messy situation almost as bad as Samson showing up at the home of his father-in-law with goat in hand to make amends and get his wife back. You will remember that one didn't go so well.

This time, the result is different. Here we find a beautiful picture of everyone feeling confident, very tolerant, loving each other all around. It's the kind of picture the world loves to portray. So there was all kinds of sin, deception, fraud, and wickedness abounding. That's just the way life is. Get over it! The world loves this picture because there were no Christians around demanding obedience to God's rules and making others uncomfortable. There was no talk about God and what is right and what is wrong. Just a lot of cordial talk within the context of a man who was out of God's will retrieving his mistress (which she virtually was) to take her back home to live with him and his wife (most likely). And the whole clan was singing with Ray Stevens, "Everything is beautiful in its own way," while they ignored God and His plan.

Okay, but it must have been a good thing because the Levite had a great visit at his father-in-law's house. *And his father-in-law, the girl's father, made him stay, and he remained with him three days. So they ate and drank and spent the night there. And on the fourth day they arose early in the morning, and he prepared to go, but the girl's father said to his son-in-law, "Strengthen your heart with a morsel of bread, and after that you may go." So the two of them sat and ate and drank together. And the girl's father said to the man, "Be pleased to spend the night, and let your heart be merry." And when the man rose up to go, his father-in-law pressed him, till he spent the night there again. And on the fifth day he arose early in the morning to depart. And the girl's father said, "Strengthen your heart and wait until the day declines." So they ate, both of them. And when the man and his concubine and his servant rose up to depart, his father-in-law, the girl's father, said to him, "Behold, now the day has waned toward evening. Please, spend the night. Behold, the day draws to its close. Lodge here and let your heart be merry, and tomorrow you shall arise early in the morning for your journey, and go home" (vv.4-9).*

For five days and four nights, they ate and made their hearts merry. Much of the time the phrase "merry heart" in the Bible speaks of an uplifted spirit, joy, and happiness — which God commends. But some times, the same English phrase is translated from a different Hebrew word and context that clearly refers to drunkenness (as in the case of Nabal). We cannot tell for sure which it is here, but it is obvious that "a good time was had by all."

In fact, the man yielded to a good time when he should have insisted on leaving. But no one wants to walk away from good fellowship, a carefree setting, joy, and maybe just a bit of drunkenness. It wasn't like everyone was getting smashed or plastered or anything like that. They were just feeling good as is the goal for most Americans on the weekend. Wisdom would have prompted the man to take his concubine and go home to his wife and kids (maybe).

Finally, after enjoying the eating and drinking more than he should have, the man insisted on leaving when he should have yielded to another night of hospitality. The Levite, who was out of God's will, strikes us as a double-minded person who is unstable in

every way. People like that are unable to make good choices consistently because they are not first committed to knowing and doing God's will. But I suppose that is okay as long as the folks are having a good time and feeling pretty good about themselves (or so our culture would conclude). The problem with good times that result from pandering the flesh is that they don't last.

As the story unfolds, we discover to our horror that some people who claimed to be "God's people" were actually savages (vv.10-26). The Levite might have suspected this problem because he expressed certainty that they would find safety in Gibeah. *But the man would not spend the night. He rose up and departed and arrived opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). He had with him a couple of saddled donkeys, and his concubine was with him. When they were near Jebus, the day was nearly over, and the servant said to his master, "Come now, let us turn aside to this city of the Jebusites and spend the night in it." And his master said to him, "We will not turn aside into the city of foreigners, who do not belong to the people of Israel, but we will pass on to Gibeah" (vv.10-12).*

Too late in the day the Levite decided to take his concubine and leave Dad's place in Bethlehem. They traveled about five miles north to Jebus, which became better known as Jerusalem. Maybe his servant was googling motels in Jerusalem on his cell phone and told the master that there was a "Do Drop Inn" advertised at a good price. No, the Levite didn't like the sounds of it. He concluded, "Let's not stay in Jebus." Why not? Well, at that time Jebusites, not Israelites, lived in the city. The Jebusites would be considered foreigners who were not part of God's special, chosen people. Their culture and morals were different. "Who knows what they might do to us." Can anyone say, "Racism"? Like some kind of modern bigot, the Levite didn't trust people who were different.

So he concluded it was better to move on to a safe town among God's people—people like themselves. *And he said to his young man, "Come and let us draw near to one of these places and spend the night at Gibeah or at Ramah." So they passed on and went their way. And the sun went down on them near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin, and they turned aside there, to go in and spend the night at Gibeah. And he went in and sat down in the open square of the city, for no one took them into his house to spend the night (vv.13-15).*

Walking another three miles, which might have taken an hour and a half, they arrived at Gibeah. Gibeah was occupied by Israelites. It is the town where King Saul would be born some years hence.

Arriving in the town late in the evening as the sun was setting, the little group plopped down in the open square to wait for someone to be hospitable to them like the concubine's father had been. Nobody showed hospitality because these were God's people. Wait! That doesn't sound right. It is true that lack of kindness, lack of hospitality is a real problem among people who like to talk about the God they really do not know or care about. Often such religious people are God to themselves and, therefore, avoid anything that might stress them out or cost them a little sacrifice. Many years ago Pat and I were talking to a woman about the need for getting to know other people through hospitality. Obviously, she claimed to be a follower of Christ, a Jesus-lover. She said, we don't invite people to come to our home because if they accept the invitation we always feel obligated to give them something to eat. On one hand, you don't need to feel obligated to feed someone you are trying to befriend. On the other hand, how much sacrifice is a cookie and a cup of tea?

Eventually, an old man showed up and refused to let the strangers stay in the street. *And behold, an old man was coming from his work in the field at evening. The man was from the hill country of Ephraim, and he was sojourning in Gibeah. The men of the place were Benjaminites. And he lifted up his eyes and saw the traveler in the open square of the city. And the old man said, "Where are you going? and where do you come from?" And he said to him, "We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah to the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, from which I come. I went to Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to the house of the Lord, but no one has taken me into his house. We have straw and feed for our donkeys, with bread and wine for me and your female servant and the young man with your servants. There is no lack of anything." And the old man said, "Peace be to you; I will care for all your wants. Only, do not spend the night in the square." So he brought him into his house and gave the donkeys feed. And they washed their feet, and ate and drank (vv.16-21).*

The old fellow's words, "Only do not spend the night in the square" hint that he was aware that Gibeah was a wickedly dangerous

town. He was not a citizen of Gibeah but a transplant from the hills of Ephraim, the same place the Levite was from. By the way, both of these fellows were from an area very near the house of Micah who had established his own religion, bought a preacher, only to lose him to the Danites who marched through on their way north (Judges 17-18). Apparently the old man knew what the people of Gibeah were like and dared not let this man stay in the street.

Suddenly we are accosted by an illustration of the principle that sin unchecked creates savages. As night fell, a mob of wicked men made a sickening request. *As they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, worthless fellows, surrounded the house, beating on the door. And they said to the old man, the master of the house, "Bring out the man who came into your house, that we may know him" (v.22).*

While the old host and his guest were getting just a little buzz, worthless men of the city surrounded the house. Worthless is a good word to describe men who are in a frenzy to sexually abuse a man who was visiting their town. The word means worthless, good-for-nothing base fellows who were bent on destruction. It is a fitting description of men who acted more like animals than humans. They were not just ringing the door bell or even knocking on the door. The phrase, *beating on the door*, means they were throwing themselves against the door, probably trying to knock it down. As we know from the experiences of the past months, a mob mentality is the expression of a society degenerating into sin.

Father and husband made a sickening response. To concede to the animals ravishing the father's guest was beyond consideration. *And the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not do this vile thing (v.23).* The man felt an obligation to keep his promise: *I will care for all your wants (v.20).* He was also obligated by social etiquette and expectations. He rightly understood that the men were guilty of wickedness and vile desires. Then how do we explain his offer to those heathen beasts? Was it somehow more virtuous for him to offer a virgin daughter and an unfaithful concubine? *Behold, here are my virgin daughter and his concubine. Let me bring them out now. Violate them and do with*

them what seems good to you, but against this man do not do this outrageous thing" (v.24).

How do we explain such perverseness? When sin permeates a culture, the people become very inconsistent. How could it be wicked and vile for the beasts to sexually abuse the man, but not wicked and vile to sexually abuse the young virgin daughter and the concubine? Not giving a lot of thought to the ramifications of their responses, the Levite seized his concubine and forced her into the mob. *But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine and made her go out to them (v.25a).* What was he thinking? Maybe he reacted in fear without thinking. Or maybe the sinful Levite just revealed his lack of concern for this woman. He might have thought, "Well, she had played the harlot (v.2) being unfaithful to her "husband" (loose application), let her continue her harlotry." Aren't you glad God doesn't treat you and me with such lack of compassion when we fail Him?

The savages were wholly given over to lust. *And they knew her and abused her all night until the morning. And as the dawn began to break, they let her go. And as morning appeared, the woman came and fell down at the door of the man's house where her master was, until it was light (vv.25b-26).* This is what a culture looks like when God's law allows Him to give people up to their lusts (Romans 1). You have to feel sorry for the poor woman even if she had been unfaithful. And yet she along with the whole culture proved, "You reap what you sow, you reap after you sow, you reap more than you sow." Yes, that is God's law, but we should never rejoice to see sinners reaping the consequences of their sins.

A Worse Response (vv.27-30).

In response to the horrific actions of the mob of beasts in Gibeah, the concubine's master did the unthinkable. Though he was a Levite who was supposed to serve God, the man showed no regard for his concubine. He appeared to have no compassion at all. *And her master rose up in the morning, and when he opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way, behold, there was his concubine lying at the door of the house, with her hands on the threshold. He*

said to her, “Get up, let us be going.” But there was no answer. Then he put her on the donkey, and the man rose up and went away to his home (vv.27-28).

Hauling what appears to be the dead body of his concubine home, the guy dismembered her. *And when he entered his house, he took a knife, and taking hold of his concubine he divided her, limb by limb, into twelve pieces, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel (v.29).* What in the world! We can only conclude that by this grizzly act, the Levite was trying to make a statement. He simply used a graphic means to alert the people of Israel to the sin within the nation.

No one who has any common sense would recommend this kind of response! It is doubtful that God ordained this kind of statement. However, it did demonstrate how incredibly wicked people in “God’s nation” had become. It was a grim reminder of Paul’s argument that not everyone who is born an Israelite is truly an Israelite. And not everyone who is born in America and makes a religious decision is a real follower of Christ. Which explains why professing Christians can exhibit wickedness.

When the heads of the various tribes received the grizzly “message,” God’s people took counsel (v.30). They all agreed that the nation had experienced something new. *And all who saw it said, “Such a thing has never happened or been seen from the day that the people of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt until this day” (v.30a).* This act of barbaric wickedness became a “mile marker” in Israel’s history. Many years later Hosea the prophet referred back to “the days of Gibeah” and said, *“They have deeply corrupted themselves as in the days of Gibeah: he will remember their iniquity; he will punish their sins” (Hosea 9:9).*

The people agreed that someone needed to do something. They said, *“Consider it, take counsel, and speak” (v.30b).* They realized that this was Sodom and Gomorrah stuff. No doubt everyone in that day knew the story about God’s judgment just like many people today are familiar with the story. The big question would be whether God would pour out His wrath on Israel because of the Benjamite sin. Which should cause us to ask the same kind of question regarding the unbridled wickedness of our own culture. The answer to the question

is that God does not always judge sin the same way, but God always judges sin.

The story reminds us quite vividly that doing what is right in your own eyes can be as horrible as perverted, unbridled sexual lust, or it can be as sanitized as the Pharisees making their own laws contrary to God’s. In either extreme, the problem is the same: The individual chooses to be God, thus throwing their Creator off the throne. And such rejection of the rightful Master is found in multiplied other expressions of rebellion against the Word of God between those two extremes. The Israelites in this story were supposed to be God’s people. They were proud to be called the Nation of God. They were proud to be identified as the unique people chosen by God. But they lived just like the worst sinners in their world.

Likewise, many people love to be known as “Christian,” which is supposed to mean, “followers of Christ.” They claim to be His special people through the “new birth.” Yes, they are born again people. But they betray their loyalty by living, not like Christ, but like all the other sinners in their world. If someone could assess a detailed description of their thoughts and lifestyles, they would not be able to find a discernable difference between them and non-believing sinners.