

JUDGES People without a King

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[0 : 00] Today we are in a really painful part of the Bible. It's arguably one of the lowest points in Israel's history. It's very confronting.

Today we are talking about the depths of human depravity, of rape, objectification, murder, domestic violence.

We're talking about sinfulness revealed bare. Anyway, it's one of the rock-bottom moments of Israel's history. One which makes you think about who these people are and who their God is that they worship.

Have you ever had a rock-bottom moment in your life? One which makes you think about who you are? They're not really nice to think about once they're passed.

They're not enjoyable to recall. You know, it's not nice to think about painful mistakes we've made in the past. But this is what today's passage and the final sermon in our Judges series will do.

[1 : 04] We're going to be confronted by the depths of human sin and depravity, and it should make us question our own hearts. And I'm up here saying this now before the Bible reading.

We're looking at Judges 19 to 21. We're going to look in particular at Judges 19. And so I'm up here saying this now before we read to prepare us.

Because this passage we'll be confronting. It might reveal something about you that you need to bring to the Lord. It might remind you of painful things in your past.

This is a horrible part of the Bible. It might be a painful trigger for some of us here. It might trigger painful memories of the past.

And if it does, please feel free to walk out. Sit up the back. Meet with Debbie, who's just over in the corner. Because your safety is really important to us. And so I'm going to pray.

[2 : 00] And then John's going to come up and read Judges 19. Dear Heavenly Father, as we look at your word to us this morning, it is not an easy word to come to.

Father, I ask that you would comfort us and give us humility as we come before your word this morning. Amen. Thanks, John.

Judges 19. In those days, Israel had no king. Now a Nephi, who lived in a remote area in the hill country of Ephraim, took a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah.

But she was unfaithful to him. She left him and went back to her parents' home in Bethlehem, Judah. After she had been there four months, her husband went to her to pursue her to return. He had with him his servant and two donkeys. She took him into her parents' home. And when her father saw him, he gladly welcomed him.

[3 : 08] His father-in-law, the woman's father, prevailed on him to stay. So he remained with him three days, eating and drinking and sleeping there.

On the fourth day, they got up early and he prepared to leave. But the woman's father said to his son-in-law, Refresh yourself with something to eat, then you can go.

So the two of them sat down and eat and drink together. Afterward, the woman's father said, Please stay tonight and enjoy yourself. And when the man got up to go, his father-in-law pursued him.

So he stayed there that night. On the morning of the fifth day, when he rose to go, the woman's father said, Refresh yourself, wait till afternoon. So the two of them ate together.

Then when the man with his concubine and his servant got up to leave, his father-in-law, the woman's father, said, Now look, it's almost evening.

[4 : 07] Spend the nights here. The day is nearly over. Stay and enjoy yourself. Early tomorrow morning, you can get up and be on your way home. But unwilling to stay another night, the man left and went up towards Juppus.

That is Jerusalem. Jerusalem with his two settled donkeys and his concubine. When they were near Juppus and the day was almost gone, the servant said to his master, Come, let's stop at this city of the Juppusite and spend the night.

His master replied, No, we wouldn't go into any city whose people are not Israelites. We will go on to Gilbete. He added, Come, let's try to reach Gilbete and Roma and spend the night in one of those places.

So they went on, and the sun set as they near Gilbete in Benjamin. There they stopped to spend the night. They went and sat in the city square, but no one took them in for the night.

That evening, an old man came, an old man from the hill country of Ephraim, who was living in Gilbete, and the inhabitants of place where Benjamin came in from his work in the fields.

[5 : 25] And he looked and saw the traveler in the city square. The old man asked, Where are you going? Where do you come from? He answered, We are on our way from Bethlehem to Judah, to a remote area in the hill country of Ephraim, where I live.

I have been to Bethlehem in Judah, and now I am going to the house of the Lord. No one has taken me in for the night. We have both straw and folder for our donkeys, and bread and wine for ourselves, your servants, me.

The woman and the young man with us. We don't need anything. You are welcome at my house, the old man said. Let me supply whatever you need. Only don't spend the night in the square.

So he took him into his house and fled his donkeys. After they had washed their feet, they have something to eat and drink. While they were enjoying themselves, some of the wicked men of the city surrendered the house, pointing at the door, and they shouted to the old man who owned the house, Bring out the man to come up to your house, so we can have sex with him.

The owner of the house went outside and said to them, No, my friends, don't be so foul. Since this man is my guest, don't do these outrageous things. Look here, it's my virgin daughter and his concubine.

[6 : 44] I will bring them out to you now, and you can use them, and do to them whatever you wish. But as for this man, don't do such outrageous things. But the man would not listen to him.

So the man took his concubine and sent her outside to them. They raped her and abused her throughout the night. And at dawn, they let her go. At daybreak, the woman went back to the house where her master was staying, fell down at the door, and lay there until day and night.

When her master got up in the morning and opened the door of the house and stepped out to continue on his way, there lay his concubine, fallen in the doorway of the house with her hands on a threshold.

He said to her, Get up, let's go. But there was no answer. Then the man put her on his donkey and set out for home. When he reached home, he took a knife and cut up his concubine, limb by limb, into twelve paths and sent them into the area of Israel.

Everyone who saw it was saying to one another, Such a thing has never been seen or done, not since the day the Israelites come out of Egypt.

[8 : 03] Just imagine. We must do something. So, speak up. Thanks, John.

It's not a fun part of the Bible, is it? The graphic nature of that passage is why we decided to have our kids' church go for one more week.

Not the kind of stuff we want our kids to be hearing, but it's in the Bible. And so we're here at the start of Judges 19. We're introduced to a couple of characters. Let me read from verses 1 and 2. In those days, Israel had no king. Now, a Levite who lived in a remote area in the hill country of Ephraim took a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah.

But, she was unfaithful to him. She left him and went back to her parents' home in Bethlehem, Judah. Okay, so, we begin with the reminder that we've had all through this book that Israel had no king.

[9 : 04] And we're introduced to two characters right off the bat. A Levite and his concubine. Now, this Levite, he's from Ephraim. And the Levites were specially selected people from God.

They were to be the best of the best. They were to be the holiest people. They were the tribe that had no land. And they would serve at the tabernacle and then the temple. They would serve God. They would offer sacrifices to God. So, this Levite was supposed to be especially holy. Set apart from the rest of God's people to serve God. The whole nation was God's special possessions.

But the Levites, they were to be the best of the best. To be the holiest. To show the way. To show the people how to serve God. To keep people in a right relationship with God with the sacrifices. And we learn that this Levite took a concubine from Bethlehem. Now, a concubine was considered a second class wife.

[10:09] She was a wife who was also a slave. And so, this kind of second class wife is a sex object. It's why he has her not as a wife but as an object.

So, the Levite is both her husband but also her master. God has made it clear to us and to Israel from Genesis 2 that marriage is to be between a man and a woman.

But many people at this time were following their culture. And so, even though it was technically legal for people to have a concubine, polygamy and this kind of second class wife, this is not God's plan.

And in the history of Israel, it's always brought heartache to people. We see this with people like Abraham and Jacob and King Solomon and King David.

It does not go well for people. These first two verses are a deeply concerning opening. This man was a Levite. He was supposed to be set apart.

[11:14] He was supposed to be one of God's key people, one of the best of the best but he has been swept up in his culture, pagan culture, taking a concubine. This Levite, it appears at the outset is focused upon himself.

And the relationship between the Levite and the concubine is not a good one. From the opening we learn that she was unfaithful to him. She fled back to her parents' home and even though some horrible things are going to happen to her, she is not painted as innocent.

She is painted as sinful too. She's not innocent. She left her marriage and she left her master. Both of those things were unlawful to do.

And so, the concubine, she had been living with her dad, her family, back at home for four months and the Levite went to persuade her to return. Now, I'm going to be away from my wife for four days this week and I'm going to be longing to see her again on Saturday.

This Levite has been away from his wife for four months. I wonder why he finally decides to go and get her back. Maybe he wasn't bothered to go and get her back.

[12:33] Maybe he just eventually wanted his property back. Maybe it was the status symbol of having a concubine. Maybe it was something coarse like he just wanted sex back.

And so, when he gets there, he is met by the concubine's father. Verse four. His father-in-law, the woman's father, prevailed on him to stay.

So he remained with him three days, eating and drinking and sleeping there. On the fourth day, they got up early and he prepared to leave. But the woman's father said to his son-in-law, refresh yourself with something to eat, then you can go.

So the concubine's father welcomes him with open arms, come, let's eat, let's drink, stay, stay for another night. No, another night, let's eat and drink some more, sit down, relax. And he keeps him there.

For four days, with food, with drink, with good hospitality. And it seems strange. Why is this father so hospitable?

[13:34] It doesn't seem that the Levite is treating his daughter that well. Why is the father so hospitable? I wouldn't be like this if it was my daughter. It seems strange as we read it.

So why is he so generous? What is his motive? What is his plan? Well, the penalty for adultery and the penalty for leaving a master, they were both severe.

It was death and disgrace for the family. And so it appears that the father is trying to make sure that the Levite doesn't press charges. Come on, let me make you happy with food and drink, stay another night, let me really lay it on thick.

Whatever you like, I'll get it for you. Trying to make sure that the Levite doesn't sue the family. He's so happy that the Levite just wants to take the daughter home, he's just giving him as much food and wine as possible.

Even though the Levite went to persuade his concubine to return, there's no mention of the Levite or the father talking to her.

[14:39] She has no choice in the matter. Both the father and the Levite are treating her as an object. One for sexual gratification and the other to avoid disgrace and loss of face and money.

It's really interesting at this point that the author of Judges hasn't written any names. These characters don't have names, it's just the Levite, it's the concubine, it's the concubine's father. None of them have names. And it seems that the author is pointing out some stereotypes. You know, this is what Levites are like, this is what concubines, this is what women are like, and this is what fathers of daughters are like.

So Levites, the ones who are supposed to be holy and serve and love God, well, they're just decrepit, sexually depraved men. Fathers in Israel, well, they'd prefer to get rid of their daughters than lose money or lose face and honour.

And women, well, stereotype of women here is that they just run off from their husbands and they run off from their masters. It paints a dark picture of Israel.

[15 : 55] And the story is about to get far darker. Eventually, the Levite and his concubine leave. And they end up in a Jewish city, Gibeah, part of the tribe of Benjamin, one of the 12 tribes of Israel.

And an old man welcomes them into his house because staying in the town square was not safe. That should concern us as we read this. Why is it not safe? And we obviously find out why.

And so they go inside his house. Verse 22. While they were enjoying themselves, some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house, pounding on the door.

They shouted to the old man who owned the house, Bring out the man who came to your house so we can have sex with him. The owner of the house went outside and said to them, No, my friends, don't be so vile since this man is my guest.

Don't do this outrageous thing. Look, here is my virgin daughter and his concubine. I will bring them out to you now. You can use them and do whatever you wish.

[16 : 59] But as for this man, don't do this outrageous thing. But the men would not listen to him so the man took his concubine and sent her outside to them. And they raped her and abused her throughout the night.

And at dawn they let her go. At daybreak, the woman went back to the house where her master was staying, fell down at the door and lay there until daylight.

This, this is such a horrible incident. It should cause us to grieve. And it's told in such a way that it, it makes it seem that God is grieving too.

How does the Levite, how does the master react? Well, after he sent her outside, he went to sleep. Verse 27, when her master got up in the morning and opened the door of the house and stepped out to continue on his way, there lay the concubine fallen in the doorway of the house with her hand on the threshold.

He said to her, get up, let's go. But there was no answer. Then the man put her on his donkey and sent her for home. When he reached home, he took a knife, cut up his concubine limb by limb into 12 parts and sent them into all the areas of Israel.

[18 : 14] Now, this is just horrible. The detail brings us to the unimaginable horror of the woman's night of torture. She was used, she was abused and she was tossed aside.

And then her body was carried with disdain on the back of a donkey, cut up and sent around the country in a sick and twisted way of making people angry at the tribe of Benjamin.

How does this passage make you feel? Are you feeling uncomfortable? Are you feeling angry? Are you feeling saddened? Are you just confused as to why this is even in the Bible? Well, it's a reminder for us about the depravity and the depths of sin that happen when we worship an idol and not our God.

That's what the book of Judges has been about. Worshipping idols and not God and the consequences. The Levite had made an idol out of sex. He'd conformed to the culture around him, not taking a wife but having the status symbol of a concubine, a sex object.

[19 : 30] The men of Benjamin, well, they see sex as more important than obeying God. The host, he prefers to honour his guest and offer his own daughter for rape.

The concubine's father, well, he worshipped his own honour and his own money afraid of what would happen if the Levite took him to court. This is truly horrible.

It is domestic violence in the extreme. This kind of behaviour still happens today. We're going to talk about what domestic violence looks like in our response to it a little bit later.

But there is no good character in this story. There is no one calling for salvation. There is no one calling for God to save them. God is deliberately pushed out of this story to show the horror of humanity laid bare.

Judges has been about idolatry of the people and here the idols are not other gods but it is sex, it is worshipping the culture, it is their own honour, it is money.

[20 : 40] Because conflict reveals what our idols are. They reveal the things we protect when everything else is on the line. We'd prefer to protect our identities than confront our sin.

We'd rather see other people get hurt than have our own frailty and sin exposed. Pursuing an idol can justify all kinds of depraved acts.

This passage might make us grieve, it might make us angry, it might make us feel sad but it should send us on our knees before Jesus.

Knowing the depths of humanity's sin, knowing the depths of our sin and the sin of the world that meant that God himself had to die.

Even though innocent, Jesus was brutally murdered. Knowing what our world is like and knowing what we are like should make us realise how big and amazing God's grace to us is.

[21 : 50] That God can even love people who would do a horrendous action like this. We should be crying out to our God of mercy, asking God that he would send Jesus back today, that he would not delay any further, that he would never allow this kind of horrendous act to happen again.

It should make us weep that people can be so depraved as to throw a person aside or reduce someone like this.

It should make us cry out to God that we would not be like this, to beg God to reveal our idols so we don't justify the things that we pursue in our own sinful depravity.

The Levites sent the concubine out to the twelve tribes of Israel hoping to get a response and we see their response in chapters 20 and 21 we didn't read those I'm going to briefly tell the story and then we're going to think about what our response to domestic violence should be.

And so what is the response to the Levites sending out body parts? Well the response is that it's the the tribe Benjamin hand us over those who committed this atrocious act hand us over we'll put them to death and that'll be the end of it but the tribe of Benjamin they get defensive and protective of their own like all of us do they get defensive and so they say no we're going to muster an army so Israel get together an army 400,000

[24 : 00] Benjamin gets together an army 26,000 giant army compared to tiny army and we get the first mention of God in all of this mimicking the very start of the book of Judges they asked God verse 18 who of us should go up to fight first against the Benjamites the Lord replied Judah shall go first so in the first fight Judah goes up and they get massively beaten 22,000 are defeated in one day they come back to God and say the same thing who should go up they go up again and get defeated again 18,000 in one day and finally they come before God with the right attitude weeping fasting an attitude of humility before God verse 28 they ask shall we go up again to fight against the Benjamites our fellow

Israelites or not the Lord responded go for tomorrow I will give them into your hands and so they do they go up they destroy the Benjamites the Benjamites started with 26,000 and 25,000 and a bit more are killed that day they destroy their city they put everyone to the sword they had initially intended to just kill those who had done the atrocious act and they end up wiping out a city and almost destroying a whole tribe of Israel nearly 26,000 people and so in response to this tribe of Israel nearly being wiped out Israel is grieving again chapter 21 verse 3 Lord Lord God they cried why has this happened to Israel why should one tribe be missing from Israel today they're grieving why why should one tribe of the 12 tribes of Israel nearly be missing they've only got 600 men left God what are you going to do they seem to blame God for this where it's just been Israel acting and so to fix this issue of only 600 men left none of whom have wives they go and take 400 wives from another city but they have 200 men left what are we going to do with these 200 men we need to rebuild this tribe of Benjamin 400 men have wives but there's 200 men who need wives what are we going to do and so they end up stealing wives they go and they kidnap wives for these last 200 men Israel was rightly grieved over what had happened but God was pushed far away from their decision making so they overreact their response was to kill a whole tribe almost and then to fix this problem of almost killing a whole tribe they come up with another terrible idea let's go and kidnap women and so we started with one

Levite who had followed his pagan culture and had taken a concubine for a wife and in response to the acts that happened a tribe is nearly wiped out and 200 women are kidnapped God God is pushed away to the very edges of this story he is just a bit part player he's only consulted when people want him in a battle and then we don't hear from God again in Judges in the book of Judges

we see this cycle of sin and judgment and Israel crying out for salvation and God would send a judge and all of that is absent that cycle is not here in the book at all God is almost absent from this tale it's a recognition of how depraved people are it focuses in on what people can do and what people are like there is no crying out to

God Israel thought they knew how to deal with this situation but they only made things worse now we might think this is a terrible story okay it's a horrific part of the Bible but that's fine I'll just turn the page it's not like us today people don't do that these days surely Christians surely we're better than that now surely we don't do those kinds of things as Steve said earlier in our series on judges we need to have humility we need to have humble authenticity as we come to God's word and passages like this as we are confronted with domestic violence the sexual objectification of women and men it's important at this point to talk about the church's response and our response over the last year there's been a campaign that's come to the fore it's been called me too or hashtag me too if you understand hashtags it's been a way of drawing attention to sexual assault and harassment particularly in the

[29 : 32] TV and film industry many people have lost their jobs because of their prior sexual assaults have come to light including an American film producer called Harvey Weinstein who's one of the most famous and again we can think that's people in Hollywood this is people far away from us that's not us that's not us here in the church we're better than that just over a year ago in July of 2017 there was a report on the 730 report on ABC and they did an investigation specifically into domestic violence in the church particularly how people use the Bible to justify abuse the 730 report spoke about a couple who lived not that far from here the man said to his wife using the Bible incorrectly you the problem is you don't obey me the Bible says you must obey me and yet you refuse and so he yells at her and abuses her you are a failure as a wife as a

Christian as a mother this man appealed to scripture to control and abuse his wife another story a 25 year old woman from Sydney was told by her church leaders to go home and go back to her husband who had been abusing her and so she went home and the husband stabbed her to death shortly after these are just two horrendous stories of people that are not that far from us not that different from we are not immune to this sort of horror if anything the statistics on domestic violence are the opposite the statistics say that one in four women at some point in their life will be victims of domestic abuse men are victims too but less commonly but they're still victims because domestic violence is not just sexual violence or physical violence there are many types sexual physical verbal mental financial social spiritual violence and we want to respond in the right way to domestic violence as

Deb mentioned earlier we have a new domestic violence policy in it it says that when a victim has shared a concern of abuse we should respond in a number of ways I'm just going to quickly read out a couple of them we should believe someone when they report domestic violence we should be compassionate we should prioritise their safety we should listen with care we should support the victim we should empower the victim now this is just a brief snapshot of some of the responses of how we should respond but they are really important we shouldn't just assume that domestic violence doesn't happen here for too long in church and in our culture and in our country it has been a taboo topic it has been something we just don't talk about when we hear about abuse we need to believe we need to honour and we need to love the victim even if it's difficult to hear about we may not want to believe that a long standing elder or member of the church could do that but we need to believe and listen to people this passage from judges paints a picture it is a scary picture of people it painted this picture of

Levites that they are sexually depraved it painted a picture that fathers don't care about their daughters that they prefer their honour and their money and it painted a picture that women well they don't obey their masters and they leave their husbands painted a picture of the people of Benjamin as depraved and the older man who invited them in well he puts his honour over his own daughter it's important to ask ourselves some questions how are we impacted by our culture are we controlled by our idols even at the cost of committing the worst sins what are Christians like what's the stereotype of Christians what are we like do we hide away from the reality of our sin and our responsibilities to act how do men treat women today is it that different do men still objectify women how do women treat men how do fathers treat daughters slavery is the same today as it was thousands of years ago weak people are trapped and abused by the strong coming to the end of

Judges this passage along with the rest of the book points out how much we need a deliverer we have no way of choosing someone who can save us he needs to choose to save us and this deliverer well he does all of this work of salvation by himself because there is nothing we can contribute we are depraved people we need a king who's not only going to save us from God's punishment for our sins but we need a king who is going to make us fit for heaven who's going to purge our hearts of the idolatry of the sin the depravity and the horrors hidden in each of our souls judges finishes with that common refrain in those days Israel had no king everyone did as they saw fit we are all searching for a king we are all searching for someone to save us someone to rule us someone to satisfy the desires of our hearts and we will always choose an idol something that we make a

[35 : 51] God that we shape ourselves for the God of heaven has sent us Jesus the only one who provides what we are looking for the great king the ultimate judge who will save us from our own depravity let me pray dear heavenly father lord we thank you for your word to us even though difficult and confronting father we ask that you would help us confront the sin and depravity in our own hearts and souls father purge it from us cut it out even if it is painful father we thank you for Jesus that he has saved us and we have forgiveness and we ask that you would fit us for heaven fit us to be perfect with you Lord amen