

Judges 19B

- Let's dive back into our second account of how Jewish society began to lose its way in the time of Judges
 - In chapter 19 we're following a Levite husband and his concubine and servant as they head back north toward their home in Ephraim
 - They have taken the risky step of traveling late in the day
 - And so they find themselves after nightfall seeking shelter in a Jewish town called Gibeah
 - They came into the city and were unable to find accommodation, which in itself is a bad omen
 - So they decide to simply camp in the middle of the town square
 - And they soon begin to learn that all is not right with this town
 - It has an evil, demonic side
 - And the evil of this place will trigger greater sin among the men of Israel

Judg. 19:16 Then behold, an old man was coming out of the field from his work at evening. Now the man was from the hill country of Ephraim, and he was staying in Gibeah, but the men of the place were Benjamites.

Judg. 19:17 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?"

Judg. 19:18 He said to him, "We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah to the remote part of the hill country of Ephraim, for I am from there, and I went to Bethlehem in Judah. But I am now going to my house, and no man will take me into his house.

Judg. 19:19 "Yet there is both straw and fodder for our donkeys, and also bread and wine for me, your maidservant, and the young man who is with your servants; there is no lack of anything."

Judg. 19:20 The old man said, "Peace to you. Only let me take care of all your needs; however, do not spend the night in the open square."

Judg. 19:21 So he took him into his house and gave the donkeys fodder, and they washed their feet and ate and drank.

- As this traveling family is still getting over the shock of the town's lack of hospitality, a fellow Ephraimite walks in from the fields

- He has moved to Gibeah probably for the work but he's been here long enough to know this town
 - So as he approaches this family in the town square, he senses these folks weren't from around here
 - So he approaches and begins to ask questions
- The Levite explains his circumstances
 - He says they're traveling home but no one has offered them a room
 - And then in v.19 he observes that their lack of hospitality isn't because they lack the resources to assist
 - On the contrary, the Levite observed that there was plenty of food for the animals and the people
 - So he's mystified for why this town has been so cold to them
- His observation is a commentary on the state of Israel's heart
 - In only a generation or two, the people of the land are without concern for their brothers
 - It's hard to overestimate the importance of hospitality in these days
 - We see it merely as a courtesy
 - And even then it's a courtesy we generally only extend when it's convenient for us and we like the person
 - Not so in this day
 - Offering accommodation to a traveling stranger was considered a duty as significant as rescuing an animal in distress or helping put out a neighbor's house fire
 - To refuse a traveler accommodation when room and resources were plentiful was tantamount to walking away from a child drowning in a pool
 - In many cases it meant placing that person's life at risk and it could result in severe penalties

- While our culture views hospitality differently, the Bible doubles down on the importance of believers meeting this obligation

[Heb. 13:1](#) Let love of the brethren continue.

[Heb. 13:2](#) Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

- The New Testament commands us to continue in this ancient tradition
- Notice the writer demands we continue to show love by offering hospitality to strangers
- He says continue, which implies that we are to do as those in Jesus' day did
- Secondly, notice he speaks of hospitality to strangers
 - Hospitality to family and friends is already assumed
 - Even sinners do that
 - But the love of Christ compels us to do even more
- In our culture, showing hospitality may look differently
 - It may not involve putting someone up in our home at night
 - Maybe it means providing food or clothing to neighbors in need
 - Or bringing meals to homeless, etc.
 - But nurture a generous heart that wants to bless strangers in need
 - And if you do you follow in the steps of Abraham who fed Jesus and angels when they came to visit him
- Such was not the heart of this town, and it's a shocking revelation
 - This is a town so heartless, greedy and evil that they were willing to doom this family to a great atrocity
 - The townspeople knew what lurked in this place
 - Yet they did nothing to help
 - Only this stranger from Ephram takes pity on this family

- He's a visitor to this town as well, yet it seems the evil of this place hadn't infected his heart
- And so he does what should have been done in the first place
- He offers to give this family shelter in his home
- But this is the time of Judges, and so we know that even this man's kindness is not the end of the story

Judg. 19:22 While 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."

Judg. 19:23 Then 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.

Judg. 19:24 "Here 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."

- As they enjoy their evening, there comes a pounding on the door of the house
 - A group of "worthless" men have surrounded the house and are seeking entry
 - The word worthless in Hebrew literally means "sons of Beliel"
 - And Beliel is another name for Satan
 - The men have surrounded the house because they intend to rape the Levite staying in his home
 - We wonder why they do not attack the homeowner himself
 - Probably because he's an old man and not of interest to them
 - So they demand the visitor
 - This story will remind you of the story of Lot living in Sodom in Genesis 19 when the two angels visit his home
 - At that time, the antagonists were depraved Canaanites
 - But this time, the wicked are fellow Jews

- So right away we're struck by how far the culture of Israel has deteriorated in just a generation or two
- Israel is now repeating the worst sins of the surrounding pagan Canaanites
- And they are perpetuating these sins on themselves
- But the story gets worse, because the response of this seemingly kind old man is as depraved as the request of the crowd of men outside
 - He proposes to give them his own daughter and the concubine of the traveler
 - The custom of the day demanded that a host do everything he could to protect and care for his guests
 - His honor was on the line
 - So this man's perverse logic must have been that to allow these men to rape two women was less dishonorable to his reputation than to allow them to molest his male guest
 - Once again, his proposal was similar to Lot's solution, and therefore it draws to make the obvious comparison
 - Lot was a man troubled by the sin of his surroundings
 - But he willingly placed himself in those surroundings
 - So that the terrible consequences of that choice fell up on him and his family
 - His moral compass has lost its way, and his peace in this life went with it
 - So it must have been for this man
 - He has left his own tribe to live and work among another
 - Moreover, he has decided that his work in the nearby fields was worth suffering in such a desperately wicked place
 - And that association has brought him to the point of making these twisted moral tradeoffs
 - He's reached the point where he can find justification for abandoning two innocent girls to the depravity of these men

- Like the story of Lot, this old man plays a small part in the larger story, but he's a harbinger for what comes of living the compromised life
 - When we start down the path of excusing sin, whether in ourselves or others, we're moving in a dangerous direction
 - It's a downhill journey
 - The going gets easier as we move further ahead
 - One day we're willing to be bound with immoral friends or work associates
 - Next, our close association leads us to make excuses for their sin
 - Ultimately, we'll find sharing it with them
 - This man has found himself in this situation making this reprehensible choice because of a decision he made earlier
 - His decision to abandon the land God gave him to work among another tribe
 - His decision to live among them even after discovering their wickedness
 - His decision to set down roots by buying a house despite the risks
 - Tonight's drama is just the latest link in a chain of events
 - In v.23 we see the man's folly as he pleads with these men to do the right thing
 - Earlier, we saw him whisking the travelers out of the town square
 - So we know he understood the evil that surrounded him
 - Therefore, what good did he expect his pleas to accomplish?
 - He is so willingly blind to the sin that he thinks he can talk the men out of their desires
- After the mob refuses the old man's offer, the Levite guest panics and decides he needs to take matters into his own hands to save his skin

Judg. 19:25 But 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.

- The man in this verse is the Levite, who grabs his concubine and throws her outside the house to the waiting crowd of men
 - This woman must have put up the fight of her life against her husband as he dragged her kicking and screaming to the door, and then pushes her outside
 - Contrast this moment with the moment earlier in the chapter when the husband was “speaking tenderly” to win back his wife
 - Actions speak louder than words, and here we see the man’s true feelings toward this woman
 - No wonder she felt the need to leave him
 - In case you’re wondering, there are no good guys in this story
 - The old man is clearly compromised by his association with this evil place
 - And now we see the Levite is no man of God
 - He displays a callous indifference to the life of his wife
 - He cares only for himself, and this a perfect reflection of Jewish society as a whole during this time
 - Everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes, but their eyes see nothing but sin
 - They do only what sin can do
 - Notice earlier the old man told the crowd they could do whatever they thought was right with the women
 - That’s the way everyone thought and lived
 - And it very nearly destroyed the Jewish nation in only a matter of a couple of generations
- But this is the book of Judges...so things get even worse

[Judg. 19:26](#) As 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.

[Judg. 19:27](#) When 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.

[Judg. 19:28](#) He 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.

[Judg. 19:29](#) 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.

[Judg. 19:30](#) 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!"

- The poor woman is assaulted the entire night by who-knows-how-many men
 - At dawn she is finally released and falls unconscious at the doorstep of the house
 - Notice she arrives at the house at dawn
 - But she remains lying on the ground until "full daylight"
 - The indifference of her husband is astounding
 - He appears to sleep comfortably on this particular morning, such that he sleeps in past dawn
 - As he finally rises from and opens the door to leave, he discovers his wife
 - It seems he wasn't even expecting to find her
 - As I said earlier, she is nothing more than property to him, and so he's acting as if he had just given away an old piece of furniture
 - He never expected to see her again
- In v.28, it's gets worse still, as he callously orders her to get up so they can go
 - But as he calls out for her, she cannot answer
 - At this point, we don't know if she was dead or still in the process of dying
 - Assuming she hasn't died, his lack of compassion reaches a zenith at this point

- He simply loads her up on a donkey like baggage and moves on
- By the time he reaches his home in Ephraim, it appears the girl has died as a result of her trauma the night before
 - And then the man proceeds to do something no one in Israel had ever seen before nor even considered doing
 - He dismembers her body by cutting it into twelve pieces
 - Now, to our modern ears, his actions may be repulsive but they aren't particularly novel
 - We hear of similar things in the news routinely
 - But that just tells you something about the days in which we live
 - It's worth mentioning that it's unclear exactly when this girl died or even what killed her
 - The Septuagint includes a statement in v.28 that she was dead at the doorstep
 - But most manuscripts leave out that detail
 - So it's entirely possible that her husband was her murderer
 - Perhaps she was so wounded by the attack that she was left semi-conscious though alive
 - Perhaps he thought she was going to die anyway
 - Or even worse, perhaps he decided she was more useful to him dead than alive since she had been taken by other men
 - Interestingly, in v.29 it says he laid hold of her
 - But the Hebrew word means to take by force, with strength
 - As if to suggest she resisted him
 - So we have to leave open the possibility that this man's brutality against his wife was even worse than we thought
- In either case, his degree of viciousness bordered on the inhumane
 - Desecrating a dead body was a sign of tremendous disrespect and dishonor in that culture

- In wartime, an army might decapitate the body of a particularly hated enemy, as when David took off Goliath's head
- But to cut up a body in this way was beyond anyone's imagination
- He cut her into specifically twelve pieces because he was sending a message to each of the other tribes of Israel besides Benjamin
 - The Levite told the messengers who carried her body to recount the circumstances of her death to each tribe
 - His intention was to shock the conscience of the nation, enflaming their passions and causing them to cry out for justice
 - He wants to mobilize an army for his cause of revenge
- In v. 30, we hear the response of the people as they see the body parts and hear the story of her death
 - They remark that nothing like this has ever happened in Israel
 - The entire atrocity...
 - The inhospitable town, the mob's homosexual demands, the concubine's rape and death and the husband's grisly response...
 - All of it is beyond their comprehension
 - So then they begin to call for exactly the kind of response that the Levite had hoped to illicit
 - They say consider what this means and take counsel, that is learn from this situation what must be done, and then speak up
 - Call out for men to act in revenge
 - And this begins a war against the Benjamites which we see in chapter 20
- Chapter 19 is so revealing of Israel's declining state of culture and morality
 - Everywhere you look in this chapter you see an appearance of kindness, love and morality
 - You see a husband seeking to reconcile with his wife
 - You see a father-in-law offering warm hospitality

- You see a man offering aid to strangers
- You see a nation incensed by injustice and ready to right the wrong
- But as the events play out and we take a closer look, we discover their sense of morality has become untethered from its source, God
 - Morality or the concept of right and wrong isn't the result of evolving standards or the collective wisdom of society
 - Morality comes from the Law Giver as stated in His word
 - If a society is ruled by God's word, as Israel was intended to be, then its views of morality will reflect God's views, at least to a degree
 - But when a society walks away from God and His word, as Israel has done in these days, then morality becomes a matter of convenience and personal opinion
 - People do what is right in their own eyes
- We can see the impact of that thinking clearly in this chapter, because everything the characters do seems to be an act of love but lacks the substance of love
 - The husband seeking reconciliation with his wife was actually something entirely different
 - First, he his choice to marry her wasn't an act of love but for the sake of gaining a slave
 - He sees her only as a possession
 - Which allows him to cast her aside when she no longer serves his purposes
 - The father-in-law who showed so much hospitality was actually self-indulgent
 - His show of hospitality was actually motivated by selfish motives, not genuine love
 - His misbehavior led the Levite to depart under risky circumstances

- If he had truly loved this couple, then he wouldn't have allowed his runaway daughter to hide out for 4 months
- Then we have the old man who appeared to show love in offering to take in this family knowing the evil of the town
 - Yet then he's the first to suggest throwing his daughter and his guest's wife to the mob
 - And even his willingness to hang around this town knowing their depravity shows the compromised state of his morals
- And the mob in the town wants to have sexual relations, something reserved by God for a loving relationship
 - But they have distorted it in the most perverse way possible
 - And they
- Finally, we see the hearts of the people of Israel, moved by the violence in their midst, they rally for justice
 - But the irony is this is the same people who couldn't be found to fight the battles the Lord brought them
 - When we studied some of the earliest Judges we noted that the people often resisted the call to enter battle against Israel's enemies
 - It reached the point where men waited for women to lead them into battle
 - And yet under these circumstances, they willingly rush to the fight
- In other words, everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes
 - And ever since Samuel first introduced that phrase to us, he's been working to explain it in all its ramifications
 - It means people lived according to their own moral compass
 - They followed the rules that seemed best to them
 - And their flesh drove their choices
 - Obviously, God's people can't operate on this basis
 - At the very least, it removes the distinction between God's people and the people of the enemy, which is the world

- And in the long run it means the utter destruction of the people of God
- This is what happens when God's people lives as if there is no king and rejects the Lord's authority in their lives
 - J. Clinton McCann observed:

By describing as clearly and graphically as possible the horrible, terror- filled, violent consequences of human self-assertion and idolatry—that is, everybody doing what is right in their own eyes—Judges 19, the book of Judges, and the prophetic canon invite repentance and conformity of self and society to the just, righteous, and peaceful purposes of God.