

The Depravity of Mankind

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[0 : 00] We come now to our reading from the Bible, and perhaps you turn with me to the book of Judges, chapter 19. And you'll find this on page 218 in our hardback Bibles, if you have one. Judges, chapter 19, page 218.

And I want to read the whole of chapter 19 and the first part of chapter 20. As well. Now, before I read the passage out loud, I must issue a gentle warning.

The final three chapters of the book of Judges form a single story. The last five chapters of Judges are really a kind of epilogue, and we looked at two of those chapters last week, chapters 17 and 18. The last three chapters, 19, 20, and 21, are a single story. And this story, as you will hear in a moment, is one of the most disturbing and distressing stories in the Bible. It's a tale of violence, brutality, and perversion.

I'm going to find it rather unpleasant to read it, and I think you will find it uncomfortable to listen to it. But our loving and truthful God decided, millennia ago, that this story should be included in the scriptures, so as to instruct us and to strengthen our understanding of the gospel.

[1 : 27] This story truly is part of the unfolding of the gospel. It won't sound like it, but it is. Sometimes the surgeon's knife has to cut deep so as to bring healing.

And a part of the Bible like this is rather like a scalpel. It cuts into the human condition rather deeply and exposes some of the corruption that lies beneath the surface of human life.

So, friends, although it's not pleasant, please don't close your ears or harden your hearts to it. Do your best to keep listening. And when we come to the sermon a little bit later, I'll try to show how this passage really does help us to rejoice in our Savior Jesus with a clearer understanding of what we need to be saved from.

So, Judges 19, verse 1. Judges 19, verse 1.

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[3 : 17] Judges 19, verse 1. Judges 21, verse 1. Judges 21, verse 1. Judges 21, verse 1. Judges 21, verse 2. Judges 19, verse 2.

Judges 22, verse 3. Judges 22, verse 3. Judges 22, verse 3. Judges 23, verse 3. Judges 22, verse 4.

Judges 23, verse 4. 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. But the man would not spend the night. He rose up and departed and arrived opposite Jebus, that is Jerusalem.

[4 : 20] 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. 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. 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.

[5 : 30] And the old man said, where are you going and where do you come from? And he said to him, we're 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'm 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. 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. That means that we may have sex with him. And the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, no, my brothers, do not act so wickedly.

[6 : 37] Since this man has come into my house, do not do this vile thing. 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. But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine and made her go out to them.

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.

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.

[7 : 44] And when he entered his house, he took a knife and taking hold of his concubine, he divided her limb by limb into 12 pieces and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel.

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. Consider it. Take counsel and speak.

Then all the people of Israel came out from Dan to Beersheba, including the land of Gilead. And the congregation assembled as one man to the Lord at Mizpah.

And the chiefs of all the people of all the tribes of Israel presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, 400,000 men on foot that drew the sword. Now the people of Benjamin heard that the people of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.

And the people of Israel said, Tell us, how did this evil happen? And the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, I came to Gibeah that belongs to Benjamin, I and my concubine to spend the night.

[8 : 50] And the leaders of Gibeah rose against me and surrounded the house against me by night. They meant to kill me and they violated my concubine and she is dead. So I took hold of my concubine and cut her in pieces and sent her throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel, for they have committed abomination and outrage in Israel.

Behold you, people of Israel, all of you, give your advice and counsel here. And all the people arose as one man saying, None of us will go to his tent and none of us will return to his house.

But now this is what we will do to Gibeah. We will go up against it by lot and we will take ten men of a hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel and a hundred of a thousand and a thousand of ten thousand to bring provisions for the people that when they come they may repay Gibeah of Benjamin for all the outrage that they have committed in Israel.

So all the men of Israel gathered against the city united as one man. Amen. This is the word of the Lord.

May it be a blessing to us. Well friends, let's turn up again our passage in Judges 19. Page 218. [10:22] There appears to be no silver lining in this passage. But there is one and it's an important one. It comes at the very beginning in chapter 19 verse 1.

It's a small silver lining but it's there. In those days when there was no king in Israel. Now just look back to the first verse of chapter 18. In those days there was no king in Israel.

Then look back to chapter 17 verse 6. Slightly longer version. In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. And then if you turn over to the very end of the book chapter 21 verse 25 you'll see that that verse is repeated.

It's the last verse of the whole book and therefore it's emphasized. In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. So I think it's clear that that verse in its longer form and its shorter form is the refrain of chapters 17 to 21 and it carries the message of the author of Judges to his readers.

I said this last week but it's worth repeating it is likely that this book was written or at least got together in its final form during the reign of King David which was in the 10th century BC when the presence of a vigorous and active king David who loved the Lord was helping the people of Israel at that stage to do what was right in the eyes of the Lord.

[11:58] But a century or two earlier because there was no godly vigorous king in Israel everyone was simply doing what was right in his own eyes. In other words it was a time of moral anarchy.

The law of Moses the true word of God was all but forgotten and everybody was making up his own moral framework and the consequences of this moral anarchy are writ large in the pages before us. Now I need hardly say that what happens here in chapter 19 is a tale of deep depravity. The events recorded here probably took place in the 12th century BC but they went down in the national memory of Israel as an episode of deep shame.

We know that because of something the prophet Hosea said. Now Hosea was writing and prophesying to his own contemporaries in Israel in the 8th century BC something like 750 BC and he says this in chapter 9 they have deeply corrupted themselves that's his own contemporaries they've deeply corrupted themselves as in the days of Gibeah.

There was a memory of Gibeah and in the next chapter Hosea says from the days of Gibeah you have sinned O Israel. Now Hosea lived some 400 years after the events of Judges 19 but the shame of this incident had so burned itself into the national consciousness that the prophet Hosea was able to use this Gibeah story as a standard of comparison.

[13:30] In a rather similar way we might think about Britain's close involvement with the Atlantic slave trade only a couple of hundred years ago we might think of that we should think of it as a cause for deep shame in our national memory.

Well now why must we read this story? why did the Lord ensure that this story got into our Bibles so that the people of God should read it in every generation?

Surely for this reason that we need to be shown we need to be faced with some of the worst and most wicked aspects of the human heart. But there's another element as well in Judges 19 we're not looking in general at the hearts of Gentile people who had never had anything to do with the Lord God of Israel people who had never heard of the law of Moses we're looking here at people who were Israelites and the chief player in this drama is a Levite a man from the priestly tribe the tribe who was specially set apart for the Lord's service so this is not just a story about the corruption of the human heart in general yes it is that but even more so it's a story about corruption in those who were supposedly the royal priesthood it's about corruption in God's covenant people the people descended from Abraham and Jacob the people who had the law of Moses had had it for some centuries written down so that it could be loved and honored and taught to their children and delighted in perhaps one reason why we find this story so painful is that it reminds us of what we're capable of

I'm not much of a dreamer when I'm asleep in bed at night but when I do dream in my sleep there's a theme that recurs from time to time I wouldn't say this happens more than about once a year but I do sometimes dream that I'm fighting with another man fighting now I have no idea who it is or why I should be fighting him but I'm fighting him I'm fighting him hand to hand at close quarters and and this is the worst thing about it I'm determined to kill him and sometimes in my dream I do kill him now friends look at me am I do I look like a killer possibly not I have short grey hair with a side parting I wear a tie and a striped shirt and I appear to wash with soap so where where does this murderous dream come from the answer can only be that it comes from the depths of my heart and

I mention this not because

I think I'm unusual quite the opposite but because I suspect that many others would confess to similar dreams and imaginations and didn't the Lord Jesus the world expert on the human heart once say out of the heart of man come evil thoughts sexual immorality theft murder adultery coveting wickedness deceit sensuality envy slander pride and foolishness and he went on all these things come from within and they defile a person God help us don't we need a savior if that's what we're like well let's turn to the story and let's notice first that nobody in this story is given a name in last week's episode in chapters 17 and 18 we met a man called Micah Micah the landowner and we met Jonathan who was a descendant of Moses who ends up as the priest for the tribe of Dan but in chapter 19 nobody is identified by name and almost certainly the reason for that is that the author is wanting to describe every man or even every Levite the central character is introduced in verse 1 simply as a certain

[17:29] Levite his concubine is not named her father is not named the elderly man in Gibeah is not named the author of Judges is making the point that this is the way things were at that stage in history this is the way Levites were behaving when everyone was doing what was right in his own eyes this is the way concubines were treated at this period this is the way that older men were behaving when the law of Moses was effectively buried and forgotten so and here's my first point when everyone makes up their own rules loving and protective relationships are abandoned trust loyalty commitment loving care disappear now let's trace it through our Levite have a look at verse 1 our Levite is living in a remote part of the hill country of Ephraim now that's an area some 20 or 25 miles to the north of Jerusalem and he takes a concubine from Bethlehem which is about six miles to the south of Jerusalem we can assume

I think that this man is already married that's why he takes a concubine but he takes a concubine as a kind of second wife and a concubine of course was not simply a second wife she was a second class wife now to take a concubine is in itself a disastrous departure from the teaching of Genesis chapter 2 Genesis chapter 2 which describes the creation of Adam and Eve and the first marriage Genesis 2 is endorsed by Jesus in the gospels and it teaches that a man is to be joined to his wife not to his wives the bible teaches monogamy and in the story of Old Testament Israel whenever you read about a man who has more than one wife it leads to great difficulties and to a breakdown of relationships even in the case of famous men prominent men like Abraham Jacob David and Solomon a concubine was regarded more or less as a piece of property and that's certainly how this poor woman here is being treated yes we do read in verse 2 that she was unfaithful to her Levite which led to her leaving and going back to her father's home at Bethlehem but surely she is much more sinned against than sinning the Levite you'll see is described in verse 3 as her husband but look on to verse 26 where he's described as her master and the same word is used of him in verse 27 the relationship then is almost one of slavery to use a rather modern phrase she is a kind of sex slave so a man would take a concubine partly as a sex toy and partly so as to increase his social status because she would produce children for him and he would build a stronger dynasty and enhance his power so the teaching of Genesis which is so strongly endorsed by Jesus and by the apostles in their letters the teaching that a man and his wife are equal before the Lord in status and dignity that is brutally brushed aside by this practice of taking concubines it was a pagan practice it had no place in the people of God and the story told now in verses 3 to 9 in our passage gives us further story details of how men were treating concubines in Old Testament

Israel the woman has been back at her family home now for something like 4 months in Bethlehem and you'll see in verse 3 the Levite sets out to fetch her back verse 3 gives us just a tiny ray of wintry sunshine it says that he wanted to speak kindly to her but the subsequent events show just how little kindness he actually felt towards her now you may have spotted something odd about the next few verses when the girl's father sees the Levite in verse 3 it says he comes with joy to meet him but then and this is the odd thing he presses his hospitality on the Levite to an extraordinary degree it seems over the top doesn't it he makes him stay for three days as it says in verse 4 and there's plenty of eating and drinking going on the two of them are sitting there eating and drinking just the two men then the fourth day comes and the Levite gets up early in the morning to head for home but the girl's father presses him to stay for yet another day and verse 6 makes the point that again there's plenty of eating and drinking going on then on day five the same thing happens again the older man says stay my boy strengthen your heart which I think means let's have another bottle or two of wine and the Levite does stay to strengthen his heart till about five o'clock in the afternoon

so why is the father the father-in-law behaving like this over the top in his hospitality well almost certainly the reason is because he's afraid you see his daughter has done two things first of all she's been unfaithful to her husband therefore she's committed adultery and second she has deserted her owner without permission both of those crimes were punishable by death and would bring disgrace to a girl's family if the Levite were to press charges so the father-in-law is being as nice as he possibly can be to the

Levite because he doesn't want to be disgraced and when the Levite makes it clear that he is willing to take the girl back without pressing any kind of legal claims you get the feeling that the father-in-law is now mightily relieved but do you notice how the girl herself plays absolutely no part in the story she's not consulted her wishes and her feelings are completely irrelevant she says nothing throughout the whole story there's not a single moment of direct speech given to her the dramatic tension and the dialogue involves only the Levite and the father-in-law the girl is just a piece of property she has no voice she has no rights this institution of men having concubines destroys the equality of men and women which is so beautifully expressed in Genesis chapter 2 so when everybody is doing what is right in his own eyes the women are bound to suffer a great loss of status and value because the men are stronger physically and more aggressive mentally there are plenty of modern parallels when the apostle Paul more than a thousand years later taught Christian men in Ephesians to love their wives and to cherish them this was a doctrine which challenged the whole flow of social history and it still does when the law of the jungle prevails loving and protective relationships are abandoned now we'll come to a second point in a moment but let's first follow our unhappy little group of people from Bethlehem in Judah to the city of Gibeah in the land of Benjamin verse 10 it's late in the afternoon by now the Levite is determined not to spend another night at Bethlehem so with his concubine his two saddled donkeys and his servant he sets off northwards and by the time they've traveled the six miles or so to Jebus which is the old Canaanite name for Jerusalem where the Jebusites lived it's now perhaps six or seven o'clock in the evening and the daylight is fast fading and it's time to find somewhere to spend the night and the servant sensibly says come master let's enter

[25 : 23] Jebus and we'll spend the night here but the Levite says no no Jebus is a Canaanite city in fact it didn't become an Israelite city until David conquered it about 200 years later so the Levite says no we will go to the safety of an Israelite city we'll pass on to Gibeah or perhaps Ramah so they go on a few more miles further north maybe another five miles or so and as they get to the outskirts of Gibeah look at verse 14 because it's put rather menacingly the sun goes down on them now hospitality to travelers was one of the most fundamental rules of society in the ancient Middle East but as this little group entered the central city square of Gibeah nobody came forward to say can we offer you a place to spend the night nobody so as the stars were coming out this little group sat down in the open square to spend the night there and their arrival was obviously noticed now it just happened that an elderly man not a citizen of

Gibeah but an incomer who'd come down from the hill country of Ephraim he was coming home late that evening from working in the fields and he noticed the little group sitting there and as he talked to them I guess he realized that the Levite perhaps the accent gave him away but he was from the same part from the hill country of Ephraim so he said to the little group look come and stay with me he was kind to them at this point he brought them into his house he fed their two donkeys he gave them water to wash after their journey and they all sat down to eat and drink and as verse 22 puts it their hearts became merry due I guess to the wine being passed round well now point number two Sodom reappears in Israel what happens next is an extraordinary reenactment of what had happened in the town of Sodom in Abraham's day back in Genesis chapter 19 let me just remind you of that original Sodom story there were two angels sent by the

Lord and these two angels would have looked just like men in appearance they'd been sent by the Lord and they'd come to the house of Lot Lot was living in the city of Sodom and they stay with him they eat their evening meal with Lot and his wife and Lot's two daughters but late in the evening the total adult male population of Sodom surround the house and they demand that Lot should send out the two angels they think they're men should send these two angels out so that they can rape them Lot refuses he says brothers don't do such a wicked thing and then extraordinarily he offers to bring out his two virgin daughters it's unbelievable isn't it but he says to them if you want to rape somebody you can have my daughters but you can't have these men because they're my house guests it would be against the law of hospitality now we are intended to be shocked we are shocked

by the logic of that alternative offer now it happens that

Lot's two daughters are spared because day the angels lead Lot and his family out of the city before the Lord rains fire and brimstone on Sodom to punish it for its wickedness our English word sodomy of course takes its origin from Genesis 19 now the story we've read tonight in Judges 19 is almost an exact repeat of Genesis 19 in verse 22 here the men of the city surround the house they beat on the door they demand that the householder should bring out the Levite so that they can rape him the householder just like Lot in Genesis says no my brothers no no don't do this vile thing because it goes against the principle of hospitality and then incredibly just like Lot he offers the gang two women instead the Levite's concubine and his own virgin daughter now the young daughter seems to have been spared but look at verse 25 the men that is sorry the man that is the Levite seizes his concubine and pushes her out through the door to the gang of men who rape her and abuse her all night long only letting her go as dawn begins to break and then broken in body and traumatized in mind she manages somehow to crawl back to the house and she collapses and dies on the doorstep what is her master the

Levite doing while all this is happening he's gone to bed he's having a good night's sleep poor lad he's tired then he gets up the following morning gets ready to depart opens the front door sees his concubine lying there notice the little detail of her hands held out he says to her get up we need to be going but just as she has said nothing throughout the story she says nothing now she won't speak again he picks up the body drapes it across one of the donkeys heads for home to the hill country of Ephraim when he gets there he takes a knife he cuts the body into 12 pieces one piece for each of the 12 tribes of Israel and sends the body parts he must have employed 12 men to be his couriers and he sends them throughout the whole country and then in verse 30 the people react just as he wants them to they're shocked this is awful they say we've got to do something about it the

[31 : 14] Levite of course says nothing about his own horrible behavior his own extraordinary callousness and cruelty the de-godding of God is the unmaning of man when human beings reject the rule of God we can quickly descend to behavior like this the most troubling aspect of it all and we're meant to feel this is that all this took place in Israel the men of Sodom back in Genesis 19 were pagans but the men of Gibeah were members of the tribe of Benjamin and Benjamin was the son of Rachel and Jacob and this old man who offers his virgin daughter to the murderous mob is an Ephraimite and Ephraim was a son of Joseph and the Levite he was a member of the tribe who had been set apart for the priesthood so Judges 19 faces us with the horrible fact that this kind of behavior can be carried out by those who on paper belong to the people of

God just think of the privileges that the people of Israel had received from God in the previous centuries they had the Jacob they had the promised land the land flowing with milk and honey in which they were now living they had the law of Moses unparalleled instruction in how to live a godly life their ancestors and they knew this so well had been brought across the Red Sea under Moses by the power and grace of God and later led across the river Jordan under Joshua they had the tabernacle containing the ark their God and they would be his people and yet they behave like this I wish I could sweeten this bitter pill for you tonight but I can't and you mustn't try to sweeten it either much of the medicine dispensed by the

Bible is sweet lovely medicine but parts of it are bitter and this is one of those parts but God himself never cut out a judge 19 from his Bible and that's why we mustn't cut it out of our Bible it's for our instruction and our strengthening we need to read it well how should we respond what is the appropriate way of responding to this horrible tale let me suggest three appropriate responses first of all we should mourn we should mourn not only that the human heart is capable of such wickedness but those who bear the name of God's people should behave like this and we should be fearful because it's we who bear the name of God's people today an account like this should force us to search our own hearts and to recognize the dark passions that lurk within them and progressive and transforming

John Newton who had spent years as a slave trader once said this I'm not what I wish to be I'm not what I ought to be I'm not what I hope to be but by the grace of God I'm not what I was that's the first level of deliverance from our sin and wretchedness that comes from putting ourselves under the authority of King Jesus it's a deliverance within this world in this life but the second deliverance is greater by far and it's the crowning achievement of our Lord Jesus and that is that he promises to raise us up at the last day and to take us to be with him in his eternal kingdom in that kingdom

friends we shall be like him the darkness of the old world that still lives in our hearts in body and in mind sin will be completely gone the lingering rebelliousness that's still there in our hearts will be gone our only desire then will be to know the

[39 : 55] Lord and to be with him to love him to praise him to look at him to gather around him to marvel we shall always marvel at the costly sacrifice that he made so as to win us and secure us that's why the marks of the slaughter of the cross are still upon him in heaven and we shall want to be nowhere but eternally at his side and never taken away from him so let me ask do you want a king like that and is he your king in Israel back in those dark days there was no king there was chaos there was darkness there was violence there was anarchy there was horror but the Lord God had mercy on the human race and he has sent us a savior let's bow our heads and we'll thank him Lord Jesus our wonderful Lord our friend our savior our brother we look up to you now in this moment having considered this horrible chapter and we want to thank you so much that you came in obedience to your father's sending and you were prepared not only to teach the people the truth about yourself and about the

Lord God but that you were prepared to pay the price that we could not pay that you were prepared to accept in your own person the wages of sin which is death so that we should not have to die eternally we cannot thank you enough dear Lord Jesus and we pray that you will write on our hearts an ever growing deepening understanding of all that you have done for us and that you'll fill us with gratitude deep gratitude day by day and joy and the desire to take up our cross and follow you even if it's costly so that we should announce this wonderful kingdom and transformed life to others be with us and strengthen us for serving you this week and we pray that it will be to the glory and honor of your great name Amen