

You Really Need a King:

Life Without the King: Moral Corruption (Judges 19:1-21:25)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on November 20, 2016

Introduction

- ❖ When it comes to preaching today's passage I feel like a parental advisory label would be appropriate. I feel like I need to warn of explicit material. If sermons had a rating system, then this one would definitely be PG-13 or maybe even R-rated.
 - ▶ My daughter has a number of children bibles, and only one even mentions the book of Judges (offering a sanitized version of Samson's story). And definitely none of them include chapters 19-21. I can't imagine how you would illustrate the events that take place and still sell it as a Bible.

- ❖ But there it is. **What we have depicted in these chapters is nothing short of disgusting.** I feel dirty after reading it. You should read these chapters in their entirety if you've never done so before, but be warned. You're going to be shocked. You're going to be disgusted. **But in a strange way, I think you'll be encouraged. Encouraged, that is, to know that at least you're reading the true Word of God.**

- ❖ **We've argued before that the sheer rawness and lewdness of these stories are a great apologetic for defending the truthfulness of Scripture.** What we find in our passage is not what you'd expect if the Bible is this heavily-redacted book put together by ancient rabbis trying to promote a particular vision of God and God's people.
 - ▶ If the biblical authors were only writing a biased, overly-flattering history of God's people, then there wouldn't be chapters 19, 20, or 21. **The only explanation for why these chapters are here is because the Bible is a book that conveys the truth.** Judges is an account of historical events that really happened. It's not a history book like the ones you're assigned in school and shouldn't be interpreted in the exact same way. But it's still a book of history – the sordid, messy history of God's people.

- ❖ If you have a friend who says to you, *"I can't accept Christianity because I can't believe in a Bible that would endorse the genocidal murder of entire villages of people."* **That's when it would be helpful to explain that just because certain actions are described in the Bible doesn't mean they're prescribed by the Bible.** Just because eleven tribes of Israel band together to punish and slaughter a twelfth tribe that offended the holiness of God – that doesn't give us permission and a prescription to do the same to offenders of God's holiness today. **Biblical descriptions and biblical prescriptions need to be carefully distinguished.**

- ❖ But still there are always going to be aspects of the Bible that confuse or offend your non-believing friends, and that's where you can acknowledge that they're offended by God's Word. But then ask them, *"What did you expect?"*
 - ▶ **If this book is truly the Word of God, did you expect to instinctively agree with everything in it?** Are you assuming that if there really is a God over all the earth, over all peoples, nations, and cultures – are you assuming he wouldn't do anything or permit anything that might confuse you or offend you? If that's the God you expect to find in the Bible, you have wonder if that's the true God who made you in his image or just a god you've made up in your own image – who behaves just as you'd expect?

- ❖ This is why I said these final chapters in the book of Judges are actually encouraging. **Because the rawness and lewdness that you encounter would suggest that you're really reading the true Word of the true God of all creation** – who made you and who's trying to communicate with you through these chapters.
 - ▶ And I believe that's my task this morning – to help communicate that message. And even though our passage is pretty long, there's still one main idea being conveyed. I know that because it's pretty clear that chapters 19-21 are a self-contained unit.
- ❖ Look at how chapter 19 begins, *"In those days, when there was no king in Israel"* (19:1). And then turn to the end of chapter 21, *"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."* (21:25) So all the crazy events that occur within these two bookmarks having something to do with what happens when there's no king in Israel.
 - ▶ I've divided this into four parts – **each explaining what happens to a people when they're living life without the rightful King.** 1) Without a King, we become our own moral compasses. 2) We become like the world around us. 3) We become defensive of sin in our midst. 4) We become destructive in solving our own problems.

Becoming Our Own Moral Compasses

- ❖ The first point is that without a King to rule over us, we end up becoming our own moral compasses. That's what it means when it says everyone just did what was right in his or her own eyes. **There are a lot of bad choices here in these chapters. A lot of bad behavior.**
 - ▶ It all starts with a concubine abandoning her husband. It continues with townsfolk failing in hospitality. Worthless fellows driven into a sexual frenzy. The assault of a woman and the callous care from her own husband. The dismemberment of her body. The ruthless slaughter of whole towns among the tribe of Benjamin. The kidnapping of innocent young girls forced into marriage.
- ❖ There's a lot going on. A lot of different parties committing a lot of different sins. But in the end, there's one thing in common. **Whether choices were motivated by lust or selfish pride or righteous anger or revenge – in the end, everyone thought what they were doing was the right thing to do. It was right in their own eyes.**
 - ▶ You're probably disgusted by their actions, and you're thinking you would never in a million years commit such lewd and despicable sins. Thank God. But don't get distracted by the particular sins found here because otherwise you'll feel like you're in the clear. You'll feel like you can't relate because you're not tempted in these ways.
 - But it's not about the various sins (plural). It's about sin (singular). **You may not be able to relate to these particular sins, but you and I can totally relate to the problem of sin.** To the sin nature we share with these Israelites.
- ❖ **The two verses sandwiching our entire passage tell us that sin is not just missing the mark of God's perfect law.** I know that's a common way sin is defined. To sin means to miss the mark. And that's true because the word for *sin* in the Greek is related to the archery term for missing the mark (the bullseye).

- ❖ But if that's all sin is, then we'll be tempted to see these characters as missing way off the mark. We're much better shots, much more accurate. But if you consider the whole counsel of Scripture (and not just one definition), sin is more than missing the target of God's perfection.
 - ▶ **Sin is you pointing your bow at God in defiance. Sin is mutiny.** It's the rejection of God's kingship and a declaration to live independently of his rule. So we're all the same. It doesn't matter if they shot a hundred arrows at God compared to your one. You're still a rebel like the rest of them.

- ❖ Rebellion was at the heart of the very first sin. **The sin of Adam and Eve was not just eating the forbidden fruit.** Yes, the action itself was wrong because it violated a clear boundary set by God. **But at the heart of their sin was a fundamental distrust of God and a throwing off of his loving rule.**
 - ▶ The serpent sowed that distrust by questioning God's love and commitment to do them good. He suggests that the reason God holds back this tree is because he doesn't want to share the joy of being God. *"For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."* (Gen. 3:5)

- ❖ Now you might be wondering, **"What's wrong with knowing good and evil?"** Why would God keep that from that? Does he want them to remain in ignorance? No, ancient readers would've understood the expression *"the knowledge of good and evil"* as referring to a particular type of knowledge that confers independence and autonomy.
 - ▶ In **Deuteronomy 1:39**, prior to entering the Promised Land, Moses reminds the people that the former generation died in the wilderness because they refused to trust God and enter the first time around. But God had promised that your *"little ones ... your children, who today have no knowledge of good or evil, they shall go in there.*
 - Moses is saying that children don't have this knowledge. **They don't have the knowledge of good or evil – in the sense that they're not independent and autonomous from their parents and the decisions of their parents.** That's why those children were not held accountable for not going in the first time.

- ❖ So to possess the knowledge of good and evil is not just about knowing what's right and wrong BUT deciding for yourself what's right and wrong. **Vaughan Roberts says Adam and Eve weren't just guilty of law-breaking but law-making.** They were trying to usurp God's authority. They were trying to *"be like God"*. To make their own laws and to live independently of him. To do whatever is right in their own eyes.

- ❖ Friends, I'm glad that you don't feel like you can relate to the particular sins you find in these horrific chapters, but I know you can at least relate to the problem of sin. **At the heart of every sin we commit is a desire to do whatever is right in our own eyes.**
 - ▶ And without a King in your life or if you (like Adam and Eve) begin to doubt the King's love and commitment to do you good – then you'll resort to becoming a law unto yourself, your own moral compass, your own king or queen.

- And the entire witness of Scripture, starting with our first parents to the last apostles, is that you and I and the entire human race will utterly fail at being our own kings. The sinful depravity in these chapters is ample evidence.

❖ **We should be disgusted by what we read, but we should also be humbled to realize that in these chapters we're staring into a mirror.** It's written in such a way as if to say, anyone can end up in this kind of depravity if you throw off God's kingship, if you become your own moral compass. At that point, you end up justifying just about anything.

Becoming Like the World Around Us

- ❖ That's what eventually happens when you reject God as King. Now the next thing (our next point) is that we become more and more like the world around us. That's the message that comes across loud and clear in chapter 19.
 - ▶ **We're introduced to an unnamed Levite and his concubine, which was essentially a second wife or more like a second-class wife.** She wasn't there to bear a legitimate heir but to be a source of sexual pleasure. Now we're told in v2 that she was unfaithful to him, in that she abandoned him and return to her father's house.
- ❖ Four months later he decides to go look for her. Clearly he's not in a rush to win her back. And her father is happy for his son-in-law to take her back, and he shows great gestures of hospitality. So much so that it feels excessive. It feels smothering. But really it's setting us up for the stark contrast that the Levite will soon experience in the Benjaminite town of Gibeah.
- ❖ You can tell that, after five days of being delayed by his father-in-law's persistent hospitality, the Levite lost his patience and it led to a bad decision to leave that very night instead of the morning. **The background of night moves the plot along an ominous path.**
 - ▶ The Levite's servant suggests they stop for the night at the city of Jebus, which would later become Jerusalem, but at this point it was still under Canaanite control. The Levite didn't think that was a good idea because he couldn't trust foreigners. They'd be much safer traveling a little further in Benjaminite territory and stop at Gibeah.
- ❖ And the irony is intentional. The Levite feared foreigners but the real danger came from his own. He arrives in the town square hoping someone would be kind enough to offer them lodging for the night, but they're completely ignored. The one old man that paid them any attention was a sojourner himself. He invites them to his home and ominously warns them in v20 that whatever you do don't spend the night in the square.
 - ▶ The reason quickly becomes obvious. In v22 we're told that worthless fellows surround the house, beat on the door, and demand the old man to, "*Bring out the man who came into your house, that we may know him.*" It becomes very clear that they desire homosexual relations.

- ❖ That's the only way to interpret it, otherwise it would make no sense at all that the old man would offer his virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine. He says in v24, "*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.*" The men of the city refuse, but the Levite – in a cowardly act of self-preservation – pushes his concubine out the door, and the worthless fellows resort to sexually abusing her through the night.
- ❖ Now those of you familiar with the OT are sensing a bit of *deja vu*. This sounds eerily familiar. **It reminds us of the story of Sodom in Genesis 19 when angels visit Abraham's nephew Lot.** In the same way, men of the city surrounded the home where male visitors were staying the night, and similarly they weren't trying to welcome but to rape. And in both situations two young women were callously offered as a substitute.
 - ▶ The author is drawing the comparisons to argue that the Gibeans – in rejecting their King and doing what's right in their own eyes – have become like the Canaanites (in this case like Sodomites). They're no better in the way they treat sojourners.
 - God's people are supposed to be salt and light in a dark and decaying world. **They're supposed to influence the nations but the opposite is happening.** The culture is reshaping them into the image of the world.
- ❖ **But just as the behavior of the worthless fellows is vile and disgusting, so too is the attitude and actions of this Levite.** His callous attitude towards his concubine is inexcusable. He finds her the next morning lying on the doorstep barely alive and coldly tells her to get up. There's no response so he places her on his donkey, and by the time they return home, she's dead. Then he does the unbelievable. He takes a knife and cuts her up limb by limb into twelve pieces sending a piece to each of the twelve tribes of Israel.
 - ▶ That's sounds crazy but there's historical precedence. **What he did was a recognized call to arms in ancient times.** Something similar occurs in 1 Samuel 11, but there it was oxen that was divided up into twelve pieces. That's customary. But to use a human body was unheard of. That's why it was said in v30 that such a thing has never happened or been seen before.
- ❖ Listen, there's no reason to think the biblical author approves of how this Levite treats his wife. Remember biblical descriptions of what happened are not the same as biblical prescriptions of what should've happened.
 - ▶ **Like with the Gibeans, the author is trying to show how much Israel was becoming Canaanized.** They were thinking and acting just like their pagan neighbors. Like the Canaanites, the Israelites (epitomized by this Levite) were objectifying women and treating them like property. The same attitude is found later in chapter 21 when they deal with a shortage of wives by permitting one tribe to snatch unsuspecting young girls and subjecting them to forced marriage.

- ❖ All of it's despicable. **And it's all because they were taking their cues for how to treat women from their surrounding culture instead of God's Word.** The Bible teaches that women are co-equals with men, both created in the image of God with equal dignity and worth. It teaches that husbands and fathers are to exercise responsible and sacrificial leadership over the women in their family. **But the culture around them says women are play things for the men in their lives, mere objects to satisfy our basest instincts.** Apparently, at this point, Israel was being influenced by the latter.
- ❖ It forces us to ask ourselves some tough questions. This Levite was totally Canaanized in the way he viewed and treated women. **Men, in what ways are we being secularized to do the same?** How has the surrounding culture influenced the way we view and treat women?
 - ▶ We look at this Levite in disgust, but maybe we need to look into the mirror. If we're entertaining pornography in the secret places of our lives – objectifying someone else's daughter, someone's else's sister, a fellow human being created in God's image, using them to gratify our own flesh – then how are we any different?
 - **Brothers, let's pray for a heart of repentance – for God to give us a holy hate of our fleshy lusts.** That the disgust we feel towards this Levite and the Gibeans might be the same disgust we feel towards our own sin.

Becoming Defensive of Sin in Our Midst

- ❖ That is such an important prayer because we too easily tolerate and justify our own sins. We need a greater disgust for our sinfulness. That's leads to our third point. Without a King guiding us and correcting us, we tend to become defensive of sin in our midst. I see this happening in chapter 20 in the way the tribe of Benjamin stubbornly and foolishly defended the men of Gibeah when the other eleven tribes asked to hand them over.
- ❖ In chapter 20:11, we're told that all of Israel gathered together united as one man. Where was this sense of unity in the book when they were being oppressed by the Philistines or the Midianites? And again that's the sad irony. **All the nation finally bands together to fight a common enemy – but the enemy is itself, a fellow tribe.**
 - ▶ And the Benjaminites certainly put up a fight. It took three attempts before the army of Israel was able to route them. The way the battle is plays out you'll notice a number of similarities to the battle against the city of Ai in Joshua 7-8. But while that was a hard fought victory over the Canaanites, sadly this is a victory over their own people. The state of the nation was in a very dark and dismal place.
- ❖ And it was due, in a large part, to Benjamin's refusal to deal with the sin within its own tribe. **Instead they placed allegiance to family/clan over allegiance to God and the purity of his covenant community.** They not only tolerated the sin of those closest to them. They defended them. What the Gibeans did was right in their eyes. We may not agree with what they did. We may not like it. But who are we to judge? Who are we to punish them?

- ❖ As you can tell, the same sentiment carries over today. When we lose sight of the fact that the church is comprised of kingdom citizens who have pledged their allegiance to King Jesus, to faithfully represent him as witnesses and ambassadors – **when we lose sight of that we tend to tolerate sin in our midst.** Sometimes we even defend unrepentant sinners instead of allowing the church to properly discipline its members according to the King's instructions (cf. Mt. 18:15-20). "We may not agree with what they did, but who are we to judge?"
 - ▶ Who *are* we? We're the covenant people of God. We're called to holiness, to live holy lives distinct from the world. **So whenever worldliness finds its way into our own hearts or our church community, it's our Christian duty, out of allegiance to Christ our King, to confront sin and to call each other to repentance.**
 - We're trying to build a culture here where we're ready to hold out gospel grace to every sinner, while at the same time being just as ready to call each other to action to purge sin and evil from our midst, starting with our own hearts.

Becoming Destructive in Solving Our Own Problems

- ❖ But having said that, we've got to know the limitations of any human solution to our spiritual problems. If we start to see ourselves in the mirror of these chapters, I just know the temptation is to get to solving, to get to purging the evil from our hearts and from our community. We'll come up with rules and programs and activities, but nothing we do will do.
 - ▶ In fact, we'll end up causing more destruction in our attempts to solve our own problems. This is our fourth and final point. I see this happening in chapter 21. **Israel didn't turn to God to purge the evil but sought to do it themselves.**
- ❖ We're told at the end of chapter 20 that after routing the Benjaminites and reducing them to 600 survivors, the Israelites went from town to town in the territory of Benjamin and put everyone to the sword. I mean everyone. **This was not justice. This was blind vengeance – even though I'm sure it was right in their eyes.**
 - ▶ But now at the start of chapter 21, cooler heads prevail and the Israelites realize they've made a huge mistake. Earlier they had sworn that none of them would give his daughter in marriage to a Benjaminite. But now that they've slaughtered all their women, who would marry and bear children for these 600 remaining Benjaminite men? Could it be that an entire tribe of Israel will go extinct?
- ❖ In chapter 21:2 they weep bitterly at the idea, at the potential annihilation of an entire tribe (a problem of their own making). **But their solutions only lead to greater problems, greater violence, greater injustice.**
 - ▶ They discover that one clan from the town of Jabesh-gilead failed to assemble with them and take up arms against the Benjaminites. So the army attacks the town, slaughters everyone except 400 young virgin women. These are carried off and forced to marry 400 Benjaminites.

- ❖ And for the remaining 200, they given permission for them – at the annual feast – to wait in ambush, and if the daughters of Shiloh go out dancing in the vineyards, they can snatch one for a wife. This way the girl’s father can say he never broke his vow to never give his daughter to a Benjaminite.
 - ▶ Again, there is nothing commendable in their attempts to purge evil by themselves. The author immediately concludes by saying in v25 that they were only doing what was right in their own eyes. **If there had only been a King – God’s chosen King – ruling over Israel at the time, then none of this would’ve happened and the evil of sin could’ve been purged without leading to such destruction.**

- ❖ **Some scholars suggest that Judges was written as a polemic against the reign of King Saul in favor of King David.** They point out the way the tribe of Benjamin (which Saul is from) is portrayed so unfavorably (cf. 1:21), while Judah (which David is from) is in a better light (cf. 1:2; 20:18). And so by the end of chapter 21, the mention of there being no king yet really sets the stage for the rise of King David, a man after God’s own heart.
 - ▶ But by the end of David’s story (1 and 2 Samuel), we realize even he’s not enough. **It’s going to take a future Son of David to truly purge the evil of sin out of our hearts and out of the midst of God’s people.**

- ❖ And we’re told that one day a Son of David entered a city of his own people where you’d expect great hospitality, but by the week’s end he was shown the rudest reception. Everyone rejected him. The men and women of the city were in a furious rage demanding his death.
 - ▶ **Instead of preserving his own life and sending out someone else, the Son of David stepped out into the mob and allowed himself to be victimized.** Jesus died in our place, for our sins. Only he defeated sin so only he can purge it away permanently.

- ❖ Friends, all your efforts to solve your problem of sin will fail you. It’ll only make things worse. The King has your solution. **The King against whom you rebelled, the King who you shot at with your arrows, he offers you peace and offers to purge you clean of the evil of sin.** You receive this peace and purging by turning from your rebellion, putting down your bow, and turning to Jesus confessing him to be your Lord, to serve him as your King.