

JUDGES SESSION #23

Last session's horrific story in Judges chapter 19 leads us to consider the...

C. **Characteristics of a Degraded Society**

The sub-headings I'm using here are suggested by David Jackman:

1. **Sexual Immorality**

- the Levite & the woman had already disobeyed God's commandment about adultery
 - they are spoken of in the story as "husband" and "wife" but it is clear from verse 1 that she is simply a "concubine", an 'extra' woman brought into the man's home as his mistress ('concubine' comes from a Latin word meaning 'bed-mate')
- this may have been an acceptable social custom of the day, as it has been throughout history in many cultures; but it violated God's biblical standard for sexual morality and this basic sin sets the stage for all the other horrors of this story
 - ...when people disregard God's designs for human behavior the result will inevitably be a de-humanization
- the Levite's utter lack of concern for the woman (pushing her out the door to the gang, leaving her out there all night, barking at her in the morning to get up from the doorstep...good grief!) shows us that ultimately people are simply treated as things when God's directions for behavior are cast aside
- the OT prophet **Hosea** provides a striking contrast with his forgiving pursuit of his wayward wife Gomer, even buying her back off the slave market and gently caring for her
 - no wonder Hosea mentions this incident in Judges; he is the only Bible prophet to do so and he does it 3 times, lamenting the corruption of these people in the days of the judges
 - in Hosea 9:9 the prophet lamented: "*The things my people do are as depraved as what they did in Gibeah long ago.*"
- the lust of the homosexual gang highlights the horrible moral conditions of the day
 - homosexual practice was to be punished by death under the law of Moses (according to Lev. 20:13) but since the Law was no longer observed nothing is done here at Gibeah to control this situation
- some of the details here in this story from Judges 19 are clear parallels with the story of **Lot** in the wicked city of **Sodom** (found in another chapter 19 – back in Genesis)
- Sodom was a city God condemned & destroyed for its sinfulness
- in that story, Lot provided hospitality to two angels, who appeared as normal men, strangers in town; they intended to stay in the city square overnight but Lot insisted they must not do that and took them to his own house;
- after they ate, a gang surrounded the house and demanded that Lot give them his visitors so that they could rape them
 - ...the behavior of the Sodomites was an indication of how sinful the twin cities of Sodom & Gomorrah had become; so God utterly destroyed them
- and now, here is an **Israelite** city whose behavior matches the wickedness of Sodom in every way!
...unrestrained sexual appetite in any society will produce a moral collapse because people who have no discipline in this important area of life will demand their own way in other areas of life too

2. Personal Violence

- this theme shows up at the beginning of the story as well
- you'll notice that the concubine is just a *commodity* – when she pleases the Levite he keeps her; when she doesn't he lets her go; when he wants her again he goes to get her
- at Gibeah the **Levite** treats the woman roughly, like a sack of rice or potatoes, pushing her out the door into the vicious hands of the gang; then with an absolute lack of concern for her he goes to bed and sleeps through the night which has become an absolute nightmare for the woman
 - in the end he shows his total lack of respect for her by cutting her dead body up into pieces
- the aggression of the **Gibeah gang** seems to fit the times – it was well known locally that one couldn't stay outdoors after dark safely, but apparently no one takes any stand against this constant violence
- violence that treats other human beings as mere objects is a natural outcome of a moral decline in the area of sex
 - there are too many news stories in our own day that show the ugly reality of this connection in our modern societies
- human beings are treated as things, and life becomes cheap
 - the trend may begin in the area of sexual morality but it doesn't stop there
 - when people are treated as less than precious human beings then widespread acceptance of **abortion** as an approved practice comes next
 - and then **euthanasia** (assisting people, especially the elderly, to take their own lives) becomes acceptable both as a means of 'putting sick people out of their misery' and of decreasing the social burden of caring for unproductive segments of society
- sexual immorality and personal violence are chilling characteristics of degraded societies, in the times of the judges and in our own times

3. the third characteristic is Moral Paralysis

- vs. 30... (LB) "There hasn't been such a horrible crime since Israel left Egypt," everyone said. "We've got to do something about it." (The Message - Think about it! Talk it over! Do something!)
- obviously the social situation in Israel has become horribly rotten, but what to do about it?
 - no one seems to know
 - ...and the reason is because the root of the problem is not social, political or economic; it is **spiritual**, and they have drifted so far from God's truth & his ways that they are **paralyzed** now in dealing with serious national issues
- oh they *do* take action, as we'll see in the next session; but it is not 'moral' action – in fact, it only makes their national situation worse

Let's conclude this session by looking at...

D. **God's Message**

1. for Israel

God's **message for Israel** in all this included the fact that...

- the **nation** should have been giving birth to good works for God, even in simple things like hospitality to strangers
 - instead, they are acting like concubines & prostitutes, & dying in the process

- secondly, the **Levites** should have been guarding them, by teaching them God's Word and caring for their spiritual life; but they did not do this, so social disaster resulted
- chopping the woman into 12 pieces was a symbolic act – it was a horrible thing to do but it did show that the *nation* itself, because of sin, has virtually been torn into pieces
- they have forsaken the fountain of Living Waters and the result is disaster & death

2. (God's message...) for us

- when people try to live apart from God, doing what is "right in their own eyes", the results are ultimately horrible
 - in our day, almost every perversion you can imagine is defended by someone as essential to human freedom or personal rights!
- having cast aside God & His Absolute Truth people quickly end up drifting into a disastrous whirlpool generated by their own degraded desires and justified by an appeal to so-called 'rights' and the changing norms of socially accepted behavior
- the 'nightmare narrative' of Judges 19 emphasizes these well-known truths and we realize again that even God's people desperately need the Saviour whom God will send to deal ultimately with all of sin's deadly grip on us
- but it may also raise some bad personal memories for some of us who have been the victims of violence or abuse; we know all too well how *bad* sinful **people** can be – what we need is a reminder of how **good God** can be

- so let me close with some verses from Isaiah 35 vss 4 - 10:

"Encourage those who are afraid. Tell them, 'Be strong, fear not, for your God is coming to destroy your enemies. He is coming to save you.' ...

Springs will burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground will become a pool, with springs of water in the thirsty land...

And a main road will go through that once-deserted land; it will be named 'The Holy Highway.' No evil-hearted men may walk upon it. God will walk there with you...

No lion will lurk along its course, nor will there be any other dangers; only the redeemed will travel there. These, the ransomed of the Lord, will go home along that road to Zion, singing the songs of everlasting joy. For them all sorrow and all sighing will be gone forever; only joy and gladness will be there." (The Living Bible)