

THE DARKNESS OF EVIL DAYS (Judges 19-21)

By a show of hands, have you ever been in a cave with a tour guide? Was there ever a point in that tour when the guide turned off the lights? Do you remember how that felt to be in total darkness? On more than one occasion, I've been in a cave when the lights were turned off. I literally put my hand in front of my face, and I could not see it. That is total darkness, and such darkness evokes an eerie feeling.

The first words we have that God spoke were: "Let there be light." We find those words in the first chapter of the Bible (Genesis 1:3). In the last chapter of the Bible, we read these words: "And night will be no more. They will need no light or lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever" (Revelation 22:5).

While God created light in the beginning, in this world there are still places and times of darkness. It is only in the new heaven and the new earth that the night will be no more.

More than 30 years ago, Chuck Colson published a book entitled, *Against the Night: Living in the New Dark Ages*. I have not read that book, but I feel like I am living it because in the last several decades since that book was written the darkness of our culture has only thickened.

We come today to the last three chapters of Judges. This is the longest section of the book. Coming in at 103 verses, it is longer than the Samson story which took up four chapters and covered 96 verses. It is longer than the Gideon story which takes up only 2 ½ chapters and 89 verses.

The darkness of this story is both surprising and terribly disturbing. Instead of reading all three chapters, let me simply tell you the story and intermix with the story several truths we need to remember.

I want you to notice that this story is bracketed on either end by familiar words—words we read last week. Look at both the first and last verses of today's text (Judges 19:1 and 21:25). When Jesus is not your King and when everyone simply does what seems right to them, that is darkness.

Let's begin with the first part of the story that we find in Judges 19. Just like the story of the Danites we looked at last Sunday, this story begins with a Levite. This would be 13 miles northeast of present-day Jerusalem. We are not told whether or not he was married, but he did take to himself a concubine. This would be a surrogate wife—someone he would sleep with but not be legally married to. His concubine had an affair with another man and ran away. She ran back home to her father's house in Bethlehem, which would be just 6 miles south of present-day Jerusalem.

He went after her to speak kindly to her. He wanted to convince her to come back with him. He was accompanied on that trip with a servant and two donkeys. He must have been a man of some means.

The father-in-law was extremely hospitable. Whenever the man tried to leave, he would urge him to stay one more day, just one more day. On the fifth day, the Levite said, "No, we've got to go back," and the woman went with him and the servant, but they got a late start.

As the sun was getting low on the horizon, they were close to Jebus, which is what Jerusalem was called then, but it was not an Israelites city. It was home to the Jebusites. The Levite wanted to stay in an Israelite city. He thought they would be safer there; so, they pressed on until they got to the Jewish town of Gibeah. It was nighttime when they arrived. They knew no one, and no one offered them shelter.

They were going to spend the night in the town square when an elderly man approached them. He warned them that it would not be safe for them to spend the night in the square. He showed them great hospitality taking them to his home and feeding them.

As it turned out, it wasn't even safe for them to be in this Israelite city. Out text tells us that "worthless fellows" beat on the door, and what they said was shocking. They demanded, "Bring out the man who came into your house, that we may know him." *Know him* is a euphemism. It is a delicate way of saying they wanted to have homosexual relations with the Levite. The old man was not about to let that happen, but what he says and what happens is just as shocking. He says, "Well, you can have my virgin daughter and his concubine. You can do whatever you want to with them." The men aren't satisfied with that offer. The Levite takes his concubine, throws her out the door and locks it from the inside.

Shockingly, we are told that the men gang rape and abuse her all night long. When the sun rises the next day, the woman crawls to the porch of the house where her master/husband has spent the night, and she collapses.

When the Levite is ready to leave, he opens the door, and there she is. Coldly and uncaringly, he barks, "Get up! It's time to go!" There is no answer. She had died right there on the doorstep.

Her master puts her on the donkey like so much baggage. He takes her home, and what he does next is the most shocking thing of all. He cuts her up into 12 pieces and sends a different piece to each of the 12 tribes so that all Israel can know what has happened in Gibeah, a small town in the small territory of Benjamin.

The first truth I want you to catch is:

The Darkness of Evil Days Descends Quickly

We need to discern when the evil things described in this chapter occurred. We might think these were in the days of Samson when both the leaders and the people had been thoroughly Canaanized. From the time Joshua entered the Promise Land until we get to Samson at least 300 years had passed. To put that into perspective, 300 years ago, our country was not yet an independent country. We were still colonies of England.

Tucked away in chapter 20, we get a hint of when these events occurred. Look at Judges 20:28. From Exodus 6:25 we know that Phinehas was actually the grandson of Aaron, and Aaron was the brother of Moses. From the last chapter of Joshua, it appears that his father, Eleazar, died shortly after Joshua. Phinehas would have been a part of the 1st generation following Joshua. He might even have been a child during the time the people of God entered the Promised Land.

Now, just a few decades after the victory at Jericho and the conquering of so many

cities, the people were doing their own thing. Look at Judges 2:10. Phinehas would have been the link between those two generations, the generation who first entered and the one that followed.

My point is that things can change quickly. We are always just one generation away from complete paganism. If we don't train and disciple the generation that follows us, things will turn dark quickly.

As an example, on September 21, 1996, which is just 25-years ago, President Clinton signed into law what was known as the Defense of Marriage Act. It had been passed by both the House and the Senate by wide margins. It was truly a bipartisan piece of legislation. It stipulated that marriage is between a man and woman and gave the states the right to not recognize same sex unions.

Just six years ago, back in 2015, the Supreme Court of the United States declared the Defense of Marriage Act to be unconstitutional and required all 50 states to perform and recognize same sex marriages. The Defense of Marriage Act simply put into law what the vast majority of Americans had always believed—it takes one man and one woman to have a marriage. Less than 20 years later, that law was gone.

Today, it is not uncommon to hear a woman talk about her wife and a man to mention his husband, and it is glorified on TV as natural. Anyone who questions that is immediately labeled a narrow-minded fool and a bigot. Dark days descend rapidly.

When the sun is high in the sky, you can't truly watch it, but it appears to move slowly across the sky, but as the sun nears the horizon, you can watch it, and it appears to dip below the horizon rather quickly. Of course, it is not the sun that moves; it is the earth that rotates. Our earth is turning, and our culture is swiftly moving towards godlessness.

It is not the fault of government. It is not the fault of the schools. It is not the fault of the liberals. It is the fault of the church. It is our fault for not being salt, for not being light, for not discipling our families, for not being His witnesses. It is our fault for cocooning ourselves in our church buildings while the world around us goes to hell. It is our fault.

Consider what God told His people through the pen of the prophet Ezekiel. Listen to Ezekiel 33:7-9. Have we sounded the warning or have we remained silent? As far as I can tell, the Church of Jesus in America is full of mute watchmen. We have seen the warning signs, but we have not sounded the trumpet.

The Darkness of Evil Days Extends Widely

Let's consider what happened in chapter 20. When the rest of Israel heard of the outrageous things that happened in Gibeah, they were outraged. They demanded that justice be done. A total of 400,000 soldiers from the various tribes were mobilized. Some of the leaders interviewed the Levite and asked him to tell them what happened. He didn't tell the full story. He gave them a sanitized version that absolved himself of any guilt. He failed to mention that a nameless gang of men wanted to have sex with him and that he threw his concubine out the door. Instead, he blamed the leaders of Gibeah for wanting to kill him.

Acting on that false narrative, the soldiers were sent to Gibeah. When they arrived, they wanted the men of Benjamin to hand over the guilty men so they could be put to death. The men of Benjamin refused. They wanted to protect their own, and they didn't want to be bullied; so, they mustered their own troops numbering 26,000 soldiers plus an elite force of 700 men, all of whom were left-handed snipers each armed with a sling-shot. They were so precise, the text tells us, they could aim at a strand of hair and hit it. If they could hit a single hair, they could absolutely hit a soldier's head.

If you get hit by a rock traveling anywhere from 60 to 100 mph, it will kill you if it hits the right place, and even if it doesn't kill you, it will put you out of action.

Instead of sending the entire army against the forces of Benjamin, the tribe of Judah went first, and they were annihilated. They lost 22,000 men. Another force out of Israel attacked the next day, and they lost 18,000 men. That is 40,000 casualties in just two days of fighting.

That night the people wept, and prayed, and sought the LORD, and He promised He would give them the victory. They next day, Israel routed the forces of Benjamin and killed everybody in Gibeah and all the other towns of Benjamin, including the women. There were only 600 soldiers who were spared. That was all that was left of the tribe of Benjamin.

Notice how this tragedy grew and grew. It all began with a man and woman who were having a domestic spat. It grew to include some really bad apples in a town. The controversy embroiled an entire tribe and then jeopardized the unity of an entire nation. We have gone from the tragic, senseless death of one woman to the deaths of 40,000 soldiers on one side to more than 25,000 deaths of the soldiers on the other, and the whole-sale slaughter of numerous towns and villages.

Did you notice that in this story we are not told the name of the Levite, or his concubine or her father, or the elderly man in Gibeah, or any of the leaders of any of the tribes. The only contemporary person who is named is Phinehas. By withholding their names, the writer is telling us, "This is what the people, all the people, are like."

When night falls, it doesn't discriminate; it truly affects everyone.

Some years ago, I came across a book by Tony Evans called, *What a Way to Live!* In the very first chapter, he diagnosed the problems that you and I face in our country. Listen to what he wrote:

The fact is that if you're a messed-up person and you have a family, you are going to contribute to a messed-up family. And if you are a messed-up person contributing to a messed-up family, and your family goes to church, then your messed-up family will contribute to a messed-up church.

Evans goes on to argue that a messed-up church will lead to a messed-up neighborhood, and that will result in a messed-up city, and that will cause a messed-up country which will help create a messed-up state that will help produce a messed-up nation, and that will leave us with a messed-up world!

We have all had a part in messing up this world because we are a messed-up people. Now, if you have Jesus in your life, you are forgiven, but you are still messed-up, and His

Spirit is at work in your life to bring you to a state of health and wholeness.

Evans goes on to write:

So, if you want a better world composed of better countries, inhabited by better states, made up of better counties, composed of better cities, inhabited by better neighborhoods, illuminated by better churches, made up of better families, then we need to become better people. It all starts with personal responsibility!

The fact remains, we are living in a world of increasing darkness; that darkness is widening. With God's help we need to narrow the extension of that darkness. We do that by being light, by shining the light and love of Christ to our families, churches, neighborhoods, and cities. Just remember, the light you shine is a borrowed light. It is not your own. Like a mirror, we are to reflect Christ's light to our world. Mirrors work better when they are clean. Keep the mirror of your life clean.

In chapter 21 we see a third truth.

The Darkness of Evil Days Confounds Greatly

The word *confound* means to be *bewildered*, *perplexed*, or *confused*. That is what the people of Israel were in those dark days and as a result of those dark days. The people of Israel finally realized they had a problem, a problem of their own making. It dawned on them, "We are about to lose an entire tribe." The tribe of Benjamin was going to go extinct. There were only 600 men left, but these men had no wives. With no wives, there would be no children, and with no children, the tribe would disappear.

An easy solution would be for the various tribes to give their daughters as wives to the remaining 600 Benjamite men. The only problem was that before they realized they were going to lose an entire tribe, they had foolishly vowed they would never give their daughters to Benjamin. Now, they regretted their vow, but having made their vow, they felt obligated to keep it.

As they mulled over this problem and sought a solution, someone had a bright idea. When they called everyone together to solve the Gibeah problem, there was one community that didn't send anybody. It was the community of Jabesh-gilead. In retribution for their unwillingness to show up, the leaders of Israel decided to march against that little town and kill everybody but the virgin women. Once they did that, they gave the virgin women to the remaining Benjamite men, but that only provided wives for 400 men. There were 200 men who were still single. What to do?

Someone came up with another bright idea. The 200 wifeless men were to lie in ambush in the vineyards of Shiloh. When the young women come out to dance at the yearly feast, those men are to grab a wife for themselves when the daughters of Shiloh come out. That way, the fathers will not have to break their vow, and the men will get a wife.

Their solution to the problem they created is further killing and large-scale kidnapping. Their answer to one rape and murder is multiplied murder and multiplied rape. Dark days produce dark minds. Dark minds make bad decisions.

You and I live in a confused culture. Our leaders mistakenly think they can think their way out of the problems they have caused by the bad decisions they have already made. The net result is that they cause more problems.

Every government policy has unintended consequences. Policies meant to solve a problem either worsen the original problem or create other problems that were unforeseen. Whether we are dealing with tax policy, housing policy, health care policy, foreign policy, climate change policy, or any other policy, government has a knack for making the situation worse.

We do the same when we try to solve our own problems on our own and do not consult our Savior and Creator. That is why wise Solomon counseled, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

A wonderful truth that we need to remember is that God is bigger than our blunders. He can take our mistakes and misjudgments and lack of foresight and still do tremendous things on our behalf. Because of the rash decisions of the Israelites, the tribe of Benjamin almost ceased to be. God kept that from happening, and some 1300 years later, a man from the tribe of Benjamin came along from whom we have all benefited. In Romans 11 and Philippians 3 we read that Paul was from the tribe of Benjamite.

I close this message and our study of Judges by reading a single verse from a letter than this Benjamite wrote. In the first chapter of his letter to the Church at Colossae, Paul wrote: “[God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.” If we want to be delivered from dark days, from the influence of our dark culture, and even from our own dark thinking, we need a King. Specifically, we need King Jesus. When you give your life to Him, He will welcome you into His Kingdom of Light.