

The Verdict: “In Those Days There Was No King in Israel; Everyone Did What Was Right in His Own Eyes

Scripture Readings: JUDGES 19-21; Dan 2:20-21; Rom 1:18-32

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Congregation of Christ: We now come to the last sermon on the Book of Judges. There are two concluding sections after the account of the 12 judges of Israel, ending with the story of Samson. The first concluding section is in Chapters 17 and 18, which we studied last week. This was the story of Micah and his Levite priest and the false religion of Israel, which mixed the worship of God with the worship of pagan idols.

Our text opens with the familiar refrain of the theme of the book, *“In those days, there was no king in Israel,”* and the last verse of the book fills in the rest of the story, *“Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”* This was a sad and somber conclusion to the life of Israel under the judges. In the previous chapters, we saw some infighting among the tribes of Israel. But in our text today, we read of an all-out civil war in which one tribe was nearly completely destroyed.

Still, there was a glimmer of hope even if it seemed there was none. We see traces of God's mercy on his rebellious and unbelieving people. So today, we will meditate on the theme, **“The Verdict: Everyone Did What Was Right in His Own Eyes”** under three headings: first, **What Was Right in Israel's Eyes**; second, **What is Right in God's Eyes**; and third, **On November 9, Christ Will Still Be King**.

What Was Right in Israel's Eyes

Our text opens with the story of a Levite, which connects it with the previous two chapters. The Levite left Bethlehem in Judah and sojourned in the hill country of Ephraim. In Bethlehem, he took a concubine (not a wife), but she was unfaithful, so apparently, she was sent away by the Levite to her father's house. But after four months, the Levite had a change of mind, so he went to her father's house to claim her back.

When he came to the house, the father showed much hospitality to him, insisting that the Levite stay with them not one, not two, but five days. But on the fifth day, after the father delayed him, the Levite and his concubine finally left to go to the hill country of Ephraim. On the way, they passed through the city of Jebus, which later was conquered by King David who renamed it Jerusalem. The city's inhabitants were called Jebusites. Since it was already late, the Levite's servant asked him to stay in the city. But the Levite did not want to, because Jebus was *“a city of foreigners,”* and not part of Israel. So they continued on until evening to reach the city of Gibeah, which was in the land of Benjamin. At Gibeah, no one offered them a place to stay, so the group sat down in the city square.

But there was an old farmer from the hill country of Ephraim, also temporarily staying in Gibeah, who offered them to stay in his house. What happened at the old man's house was a retelling of the story of Sodom in Genesis 19. The men of Benjamin, *“worthless fellows,”* or rabble, came to the house and demanded, *“Bring out the man who came into your house, that we may know him.”* Well, this didn't sound very bad, did it? These worthless men just wanted to

say Hi and have a few more drinks. But in the Bible, the word “to know” usually means “to know someone sexually.” For examples: Adam “knew” his wife Eve, and they had a son (Gen 4:1, 17); Joseph did not “know” Mary until after she had given birth to Jesus (Matt 1:25).

The Benjamites were reenacting the Sodomites, who demanded from Lot, “*Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them.*” But just as Lot told the Sodomites, “*Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please. Only do nothing to these men*” (Gen 19:5-8), the old man in Gibeah said to the Benjamites, “*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.*” Both Lot and the old man were so callous that they did not consider the violation of their daughters and the concubine an “outrageous thing.”

So the writer of Judges is saying to his readers, “These Benjamites, a tribe of Israel who are not pagans, are as wicked as the pagans in Sodom and Gomorrah. A stranger in the land was more hospitable than these wicked Israelites!”

The Levite then callously gave his concubine to the worthless rabble. They sexually abused her the whole night, and left her for dead in the morning. When the Levite got up, he found her dead outside the door, but he was so apathetic to her condition that he even said, “Get up, let's go!” He took her body to his home, cut her up into 12 pieces, and sent one piece to each of the 12 tribes of Israel. The reaction of the 12 tribes was, “Such a thing has never been done before!”

What is Right in God's Eyes

Chapter 20 is the narrative of Israel's civil war. All the eleven tribes were united in their decision to fight against the Benjamites for what they did against the Levite and his concubine. The war didn't seem to be fair: 400,000 Israelites against 26,000 Benjamites. But the Benjamites were more skilled in war, soundly defeating the Israelites in two battles. So the Israelites wept and fasted and offered sacrifices to the LORD, asking the LORD if they should again fight another battle. After the LORD told them that they would be victorious in the third battle, they finally defeated the Benjamites. Only 600 men escaped from the battle, hiding in a rock in the wilderness. The Israelites killed all the men and beasts, and set on fire all their cities.

These two chapters showed the depths of Israel's descent into unbelief, wickedness and apostasy. God's own chosen people had violated all his laws. They worshiped other gods, and made carved images of them. They misused the name of God, and tried to manipulate God. They had outward prayers and sacrifices, but only because they wanted to do what they wanted to do. Their sacrifices meant nothing to God because their hearts were unrepentant. They violated the Sabbath because they were idolaters.

They disobeyed their parents and other authorities. The Benjamites disregarded the other authorities in Israel. Israel had a murderous bent, even against their own people. Unlike Joshua, they had no authority from God to completely destroy their own brothers. They committed adultery left and right, even taking pagan women as wives and concubines. They stole each other's properties. They lied against each other. The Levite lied to the Israelites, claiming that the leaders of Gibeah, not the worthless rabble, led the assault against him and his concubine.

Their violations of God's laws were complete and done, or so it seemed. But there were other atrocities yet to follow.

In Chapter 21, more chaos followed the defeat of Benjamin. The Israelites regretted the thought that one of their own tribes might completely disappear. So they decided to provide wives for the 600 Benjamite men who survived. But how did Israel provide these wives?

It was another horrific, wicked scheme by Israel. At Mizpah before the war, the men of Israel made a vow, *"No one of us shall give his daughter in marriage to Benjamin."* So where would 600 women come from? They said from the clan of Jabesh-gilead, because they did not send men in the war against Benjamin. So they attacked Jabesh-gilead, killed all its inhabitants, and took 400 women from the city. But from where would the 200 more women needed come? Again, they devise another wicked plan. They commanded the 200 Benjamites still without wives to go to Shiloh during a festival, and take a woman each for their wife. So they did.

The end of the Book of Judges is both sad and striking. Verse 24 says, *"And the people of Israel departed from there at that time, every man to his tribe and family, and they went out from there every man to his inheritance."* It is as if nothing had happened; they just went on with their lives after all the gross idolatry, murder, immorality, lying and stealing that they had committed against God and against their brothers. This is in stark contrast with the end of the Book of Joshua, when after the conquest of the Promised Land, they all joyfully and peacefully settled in their own lands, *"So Joshua sent the people away, every man to his inheritance"* (Josh 24:28).

They did, each man, what was right in their own eyes, violating God's holy laws as Genesis 6:5 says, *"every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."* And this is also the condition of our nation today, and even the whole world.

But what was right in God's eyes? *We are to worship only the true God with true worship.* But we worship our own "carved images" of money, sex, power, drugs and alcohol, Hollywood and sports celebrities. Many say they believe in God, but these are what they worship. What else can it be when five more states, including California, in addition to four states, will most likely vote for legalizing recreational marijuana? Twenty-five states so far have legalized marijuana in some form, including "medical" marijuana. Marijuana has become one of our idols.

What is right in God's eyes is honoring his holy name, but we give lip service to God and his holy commandments. Every political candidate says, "God bless America!" and "I'm a Christian" when there's nothing Christian in their lives and in their programs. We use the name of God and Christ to deceive and manipulate for money and privilege.

What is right in God's eyes is honoring his holy day, the Lord's Day. We don't expect unbelievers to do this, but we see that 70 percent of people who say they are "born again" Christians desecrate the Lord's Day. They say they can read the Bible and pray at home, at the ball park, at the park barbecue with friends. They say they don't dishonor God because they already have a "personal relationship" with Jesus.

What is right in God's eyes is obeying and honoring our parents and every authority. But we have little children who will turn their parents in for child abuse, when the parents discipline them. In recent days, we have millionaire celebrities disrespecting the national anthem and the

flag who have become role models for our children. We have people and even civil authorities who have openly declared war against police officers, even murdering them.

What is right with God is honoring and respecting human life. But we have legalized mercy killing in some states. We have abortion on demand, up to the day of an infant's birth, murdering tens of thousands of unborn babies every year. Tens of thousands of people are murdered every year, particularly in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Oakland, Miami and other urban areas. How much longer can God be patient with the murder of human beings he created in his own image?

Hate, offense and political correctness are the rules of our culture. A tiny mistake in driving will cause another driver's road rage. People are offended by what you wear; by a little word; by the mascot of the Washington Redskins; by the true gospel that is preached in churches; by the Ten Commandments, the last four of which are honored even by unbelievers. A customer in a restaurant was offended by a Christian who prayed before his meal. A teacher has to be very careful not to say anything about any religion (except Islam, of course). This is why America has the highest number of lawyers and civil lawsuits per capita in the world. Medical costs are skyrocketing partly because of the fear by doctors of litigation.

What is right in God's eyes is chastity and honor of men and women before marriage. Wholesale abortion happens because of sexual immorality. Unwed teenage mothers are so commonplace that a teenage girl would be laughed at if she's still a virgin by her 14th birthday. Several months ago, a judge sentenced a Stanford student for sexually assaulting an unconscious girl to six months in jail. And he was released after three months! Sexual immorality has become so routine that even rapists and sexual offenders get a mere slap on the wrist. Adultery among married couples is the cause of most divorce. Homosexuality, called an abomination in God's holy Word, is now "affirmed" even in churches and by some evangelical leaders. How else can it be, when we see that half the population vote for those who redefine marriage as not only between a man and a woman? Read God's condemnation of this in Romans 1:18-32.

What is right in God's eyes is honoring and respecting our neighbors' properties. But we go to court against others to legalize stealing. Fraud and identity theft happens daily. Our small bank savings are in danger of being stolen by Internet hackers. All kinds of fraudulent schemes are invented by worthless people to pick your pockets. Politicians and powerful people manipulate the system and legal loopholes to make millions through fraudulent schemes, corporations, tax returns, and foundations. And they get away with it.

What is right in God's eyes is speaking the truth. But we lie and deceive one another daily to get what we want, to manipulate one another. Politicians lie and perjure themselves openly in court and before Congress, but they go unpunished. But even common citizens do this often to avoid prosecution. Corruption now go deep in the halls of the government, in the courts of justice, and in the daily marketplace.

This then is the true state of our nation. What was wrong and unjust and a lie just a few decades ago are now right and just and true. Everyone is doing what is right in his own eyes.

On November 9, Christ Will Still Be King

Just like Israel in the Book of Judges, our nation has sunk into the depths of spiritual and moral darkness. The people walk in darkness, just as Israel did. The fabric of our culture is unraveling, families are breaking apart, and the political and judicial systems are in ruins.

In two days, America will vote for a new king. The Book of Judges seem to be saying that Israel was in moral and spiritual chaos because it had no king. God appointed judges to rule over the people and to deliver them from foreign oppressors. But they too were corrupt and flawed. So they clamored for a king, and Saul was appointed king, but he too was wicked. He was followed by King David—“a man after God's own heart”—was also morally and spiritually flawed. And a great majority of Israel's kings were wicked men. What kind of king would have prevented Israel's descent into chaos, into a culture of “everyone doing what was right in their own eyes”?

It is true that a righteous and just king usually turns a nation into righteousness and justice. But it is also true that righteousness and justice depend on the people. If the people are evil, then they would choose an evil king with his evil programs. Then this king will lead the people into deeper depths of evil. It is a vicious downward spiral, just as we have seen in the Book of Judges.

So we, the people, especially Christians, must not depend and trust in princes. The psalmist warns, *“It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes”* (Psa 118:9). And in one of our songs, we sang Psalm 146:3-4, *“Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.”* Why can't we trust in kings? Not only is he a sinful, flawed man, but as the psalmist says, *“When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish.”*

Dear Friends, there is only one King who does not depart or die: Jesus Christ, the Living God, the King of Kings forever and ever. He is the only King who is not flawed or corrupt like all human beings. He is the one who perfectly obeyed all of God's laws. He did what was right in God's eyes. Therefore, Isaiah prophesied that his government and his kingdom will be of peace, justice and righteousness, *“and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore”* (Isa 9:6-7).

Forevermore. No other king rules forevermore. Remember Daniel's words: God *“removes kings and sets up kings”* (Dan 2:21). On Tuesday, the old king will be removed, and a new one set up by God. But whoever is set up, that king will also be removed in the future. Only Jesus Christ and his kingdom will always remain.

Let us pray: Almighty Father, our nation is in critical condition. Send your Holy Spirit upon the land that we the people will acknowledge our moral and spiritual depravity; that we may do what is right in your eyes alone; that we may vote wisely and Biblically, knowing the holy and righteous standard you have set in your Word. For we ask it in the name of our Just and Righteous King, even Jesus Christ the our Eternal King. Amen.