

Lies, Rape and Murder: Judges 19

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Once there was a family who was in the car driving home from church.

The little boy was really excited. “Mom! Mom! Guess what I learned in Sunday School today!” The mother, who was rather pleased that her son had been listening so intently in class, asked him in anticipation: “What did you learn, son?” “King Solomon had 700 wives and 300 PORCUPINES!” (Concubines!)

Many people know that in the Ancient Near East the practice of having multiple wives and concubines was practiced. A concubine was either sold as a sexual slave into this situation with a man, or else she came voluntarily into a man’s household. She received a place to live, food and protection; and he gained her exclusive sexual favors and any children that she may bear.

Concubines were of lower social rank than wives, and some scholars believe that this situation occurred because the concubine’s family of origin could not financially afford to give them away as wives with the full legal dowry.

Concubines could easily be dismissed, their children taken from them and given to the husband’s actual wives to raise as their own. --Without prominent families, and without the legal status as a wife, concubines are sometimes described as **the Kleenex of the ancient world. --They could be used as needed, and discarded without too much trouble.**

The Levite's Concubine found here in Judges 19 seems to be a concubine who came to the Levite of her own free will, or perhaps, due to the encouragement of her family. But the exact circumstances of the concubine **leaving** the Levite seems to be a matter of debate. There are some differences in the ancient texts. In the Masoretic and Syriac version of Judges 19, the concubine is **accused of adultery**, and in the Greek and the Old Latin texts; she became **angry with the Levite**. --Now, it could very easily be that both versions are true, and that the Concubine was accused by the Levite of adultery, and that she, feeling falsely accused, became angry.

But in both cases, the texts agree about what happened next. The concubine left the Levite and she went back home to her Father's house. Now, this is an act of undeniable courage for this young woman. There was no welfare system, no women's shelters, and no real options for employment. And she seemingly left and made the journey home alone, without a man guarding her.

--Some commentators even argue that her leaving the Levite's house was the reason for the accusation of adultery. That removing herself from the sexual use of the Levite was enough for him to call for her death. It was a dangerous move for a woman in her situation.

--Now, it is perhaps telling that the Levite simply lets her go, that he does not follow up on his accusation of adultery by pursuing her immediately and demanding her death for being unfaithful to him.

Instead, four months later, The Levite decides to go talk to her. His goal is to bring her back from Bethlehem. The Hebrew phrase used here about the Levites intentions means "To speak to her heart" and it brings to mind reassurances, comfort and tender words of love. --We would like it if the story ended here with a happily ever after ending; but the story goes on and it illustrates the lies that were so easily told.

1. Lies

The first thing to note is that Levite lies. It is a lie that the Levite actually cares about the concubine. This is clear from the Levite's actions, not from what he says. Once the Levite reaches the concubines house, it is only the two men who party together for five days. The concubine is not spoken to, nor is she invited to come eat and drink with the Levite in order to bring about any type of reconciliation between them. Her silence is an important thing to notice in this passage. It speaks volumes about her place in the situation. Instead we read the details about the father happily entertaining this wealthy Levite, and how her father encourages the Levite to stay and to eat and drink and to enjoy himself well beyond the time that the Levite wants to remain there. The concubine is left to reconcile herself to the situation, and it is clear by his actions that her father wants her to return to her husband and to have him be in a happy mood. All of

the authority figures in her life are giving the concubine the same message: “Just do what you are supposed to and everything will be just fine.”

The church too, is culpable in many situations such as this. A friend of mine was the victim of domestic violence, and subjected to lies from her church. Her husband would belittle her, call her stupid, even in public, and when he became angry – he would hit her. In desperation, she went to her pastor for help. The pastor quickly diagnosed the problem as hers. He told her that her heart did not truly want to be submissive to her husband. He counseled her that once she truly submitted to her husband’s desires, that she would have no more trouble with her marriage. ---She should learn more about how to please her husband, how to be the wife he wanted her to be; she should do that and submit to everything that he asked of her. She left the church office with a great resolve to do this, she honestly tried to do everything that her husband wanted and completely put her own desires behind his. But the advice was a lie. With a month, he had thrown her out of the house, -- through a glass door. She finally left him, and she didn’t go back.

My friends, lies are a powerful tool in manipulating a person. When we lie, a person's need and desire to know the truth becomes secondary to our own wants and desires. It is a degrading of their need for honest and open dialogue for your own self serving interests. --When we honestly value someone, we tell them the truth. ---How easily we put our own interests above the needs of other people when we lie to them.

The story in Judges continues. The Levite finally gets tired of the father, and he gets up and leaves. He takes the donkeys and his servant and the concubine. He continues on his journey and doesn't take the advice of the father or his servant. He is clearly the one in charge. The Levite is the one who makes the decision to travel on to the village of Gibeah. It is dark already when they arrive, and I imagine that most of the good folks are already at home, well past supper and getting ready to go to sleep for the night.

1. Rape

In a situation that is almost an exact echo of the story in Genesis 19 about Sodom, some men of Gibeah come and pound on the old man's door. They demand that the Levite man be given to them to be raped. Like many of the rapes of men that occur in prison, the mobs demand was for supreme power over and humiliation of the Levite. It had nothing to do with homosexuality.

By the laws of hospitality in the Ancient Near East which protected strangers in one's midst; this is a terrible offense. The old man is required to protect the stranger who he has invited into his house. He, just like Lot in the Genesis story, offers up his virgin daughter to the mob. Then the old man goes a step further, he also offers up the concubine of the Levite. And with words that chill us to the bone, the old man suggests that the men rape his daughter and the concubine and do whatever they want to them.

The text here is about a struggle for power. Rape is motivated by the desire for domination and control. Here it clearly seen as an act of violence, not desire. The men in the crowd want power over the Levite, and the old man enacts his power over the most vulnerable. **It is important to notice that the old man does not offer the mob the male servant of the Levite.** --Instead he takes up the most common power that his societal position as a male in the Ancient Near East gives him. --The societal power of a patriarchal culture that consistently places all women under the rule of men. --The societal power that did not give women a legal voice, and which denied them the right to determine their own fate.

How far have we come since then? In 2010 the Center for Disease Control surveyed for some answers: 1 in 4 of surveyed women and 1 in 7 of surveyed men said that they had been the victim of severe physical violence from their intimate partner. 18.3 % of women over 18 reported being raped sometime in their lifetime. If you compare this statistic to the

number of women who say that they are smokers, the number is larger. Only 17.4 % of women identify themselves as smokers.

One night when I was in college, one of my suite mates came in after 3 AM. While I didn't think so much about the time, I was a little annoyed by the fact that she then proceeded to take an hour and a half shower. It was only months later that I found out the reason for her unusual behavior.

She had been out on her third date with a man; and against her better judgment she agreed to go with him to see his apartment. After a bit of kissing and petting she wanted him to take her back to campus. He refused. And even though she really didn't want to; they had sex. She told me that she "let him do it" because she didn't know where his apartment was and had no idea of how she would get back to campus without his driving her back.

She blamed herself for going to his apartment. She never pressed charges, told very few people, and was not surprised when he never called her again. But she herself was not the same. She felt stained and used, her self esteem was crushed and the hour and a half in the shower could not wash away the memory of what he did to her. Like many rape victims, she didn't want to think about it. She just wanted the memory to fade like a bad nightmare.

The sad truth in America today is that most victims of date rape never press charges because date rape is very difficult to prove. The victims of date rape are automatically blamed. Everything from what she was wearing to what she drank to what she actually said are dragged out into public and held up to the question of whether it was clear enough to the perpetrator that she really did say no to having sex.

Rape is not isolated to strange men in dark allies nor to college campuses at drunken fraternity parties. 10- 14 % of married women report marital rape. Marital rape was not even legally a crime in all 50 states until 1993.

In rape and with other forms of abuse, the abused no longer is a subject in their own right. They become an object; a tool to get what the abuser wants when they want it. The power and the control of an abuser over the abused crushes their souls and often their will to live. In one way or an other, abuse often leads to death.

In our text today, it is unclear exactly when the concubine dies. The Levite throws her out to the mob who forcefully rape and abuse her all night long. At dawn, the abusers let her go, and somehow she manages to drag herself back to house where her master is. At this point, it is certain that the concubine is still alive.

It is then that the character and the true feelings of the Levite become crystal clear. Instead of waiting up for her, watching through the night, being even remotely concerned about her safety; the Levite goes to sleep. In the morning the Levite opened the doors to the house; and he undoubtedly saw her lying there with her hands on the threshold. Yet he did nothing. He did not bind her wounds, give her any food or drink or even bring her into the house to lie down in comfort. There is not even a simple query as to how she is doing. Every common courtesy that the Levite demanded for himself from strangers is actively withheld from this woman. The concubine remains, nameless, excluded, outside the door, in the dust of the ground; beaten and broken in spirit and in flesh.

Finally, when the Levite is all set to leave, with his donkey saddled and his wine and food all packed, only then do we find **the only words** of the Levite to his concubine in this whole sad text. "Get up." He said to her . "We are going".

But there was no answer.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as the people of God, we are called to stand up to injustice. We are called to recognize the signs of violence and stop it in every way that we can. As followers of Jesus Christ, who himself was tortured and staked to a cross with curses and blows and blood and sweat mingled down, it is our task to say, "ENOUGH!" and to advocate for those individuals who are abused.

It is our call to tell the truth about power and equality in adult relationships. We must not allow the lies about "Biblical Submission" to keep women captive in unequal and unhealthy relationships. We must teach and promote Biblical equality between men and women in our churches and in our homes.

It is our call to teach each other, our brothers, our sisters, our fathers and mothers, our daughters and our sons about how each of us is made in the image of God, and how **each person** must be treated with respect and dignity. We must continually stress that God calls our adult relationships to be based on equality and love.

And finally, we must not be silent when we suspect that domestic abuse is occurring. Our gut reaction to give each other privacy and to mind our own business **does not apply when there is abuse**. This crime happens to people in every neighborhood, in every congregation, in every social class and in every ethnic group --everywhere.

It is a **crime**, it is a **sin**; and it is an **abomination before God** to treat one of God's created people as simply an object or as a means to an end.

And so today's sermon ends with a challenge:

Will you do nothing, and simply go on with your own business? Will you simply walk out of the doors to your house and go on your way to your destination? Will you not look out for your neighbors and monitor the situations that are occurring right now down the hall, or down the block? Will you simply ignore the hands of the abused people that crawl for help to the **threshold of this church** and to the threshold of your home?

God forbid that we do!!! Amen.

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