

Place: Lurgan Baptist 18:3:2003

Readings: Judges 19:1-4 20:1-7 21:24-25

HEARTS OF IRON, FEET OF CLAY

16. A PERMISSIVE SOCIETY

Out of all the Canary Islands Tenerife is my favourite. Its climate, walks, promenade, hotels for me sets it apart from the rest. But up until 3rd April 1977 many people would have known nothing about a place called Tenerife, let alone the location of the Canary Islands. But on that day at a little airport, two 747s collided on the runway. That accident left 575 people dead, thousands mourning, and put Tenerife at the focal point of world attention. *There are some questions about that tragedy which will never be answered, although the chief facts are clear.* The airport was crowded because the main airport at Los Palmas had been closed due to a bombing. As a result, the 747s had to taxi on the runway rather than on the taxiway. It was a foggy day, and the two pilots could not see one another, but for some inexplicable reason, the Dutch pilot began his takeoff without clearance from the control tower. Obviously, he thought he was doing the right thing, but he was not.

The other plane was in the way, and he was unable to avoid it. As a result hundreds of people were killed. Now every pilot is taught one very basic lesson at the beginning of his training. In an air traffic control zone,

you do not do what seems best in your eyes, you do what the control tower tells you to do. That is always true, but it is especially true when the visibility is bad. The reason is of course very simple. *The controller knows things that you do not know. He has better information and a better perspective to guide a pilot safely to his destination.* To act on your own causes disasters. That is an obvious principle of aviation, but it is also an important principle of life. My we live at a time when a thick moral fog has settled upon our society. The old moral landmarks have been obliterated, and no one seems to know the difference between right and wrong. Ethically the visibility is nil, and people are groping for anything that will help them find their directions.

Its very tempting at such a time to live by your own standards, to do what is right in your own eyes. This passage of Scripture gives us a vivid picture of what happens when we follow that method. The other alternative of course is to be guided by someone who can see what we cannot see and who knows what we do not know. The fact is if we commit ourselves to doing what is right in God's eyes we will be directed safely through the moral fog. *You see, the Lord is not a Controller who makes mistakes.* He is the omniscient, loving Father who wants only the best for His children. Now the last three chapters of the Book of Judges is the sewer of Scripture. Here are described a series of events which are the ugliest, foulest, and most depraved happenings in the whole of the Bible. Now remember that although these happenings are recorded at the end of the Book of Judges they probably

occurred not long after Joshua's death. (20:28 Jos 22:10-34) To read these chapters is just like reading a newspaper today. For in these closing pages of Judges you find reports of wife abuse, blatant homosexuality, gang rape leading to murder, injustice, brother killing brother, and even kidnapping. Indeed there is set before us here in no uncertain terms, "A PERMISSIVE SOCIETY." Let's try and analyse these chapters.

(1) A RAPE THAT IS SHAMEFUL

Now try and understand that what they did here was evil, foul and revolting but they rationalised it in such a way that it was right in their own eyes. Do you recall the key verse of the Book of Judges, "*In those days there was no King in Israel every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*" (21:25) Is this not the way our civilised world operates today ? When the authorities accuse, condemn, punish criminals, murderers, rapists they all have an answer. They can justify everything they have done in their own eyes. It may be against the law of the land, the law of God but they stand unrepentant and rebellious. They did what was right in their own eyes. Now in (Chs 17-18) we have a story of Spiritual Anarchy, here in (Chs 19-21) we have a story of Moral Anarchy. But in both those passages men are doing evil, gross evil, because it is right in their eyes.

Listen to these words, "*I have spent the best years of my life giving people the lighter pleasures and all I get is abuse and the existence of a hunted man.*" Who do you think wrote those words ? Al Capone, the gangster. My when God goes, everything and anything goes.

Now lets note the several steps that led to this shameful act of rape. There was:

(a) FAITHLESSNESS:

Look at (19:1-2) The story begins with an unnamed Levite living with his concubine in the hill country of Ephraim. Now a concubine was a kind of second class wife, who was either a slave or a woman without a dowry. (Exod 21:7-11 Deut 21:10-14) This concubine was unfaithful to the Levite, and finally, she deserted him, and went back to her father's home in Bethlehem. After four months the husband set out seeking a reconciliation and after long drawn out celebrations the Levite set out home with his concubine. But it all started with faithlessness ! (Lev 20:10) The sign that hung in the Hollywood jewellery store for several months did not even make front page news in the Los Angeles Times. It read, "*We rent wedding rings.*" My this temporary commitment to marriage is now being embraced by Christians. By Christians ? Yes ! Listen, we have the power and presence of the Living Lord available to us, the prayer support of others in the family of God, the internal ministry of the Holy Spirit and the Divinely Inspired Handbook of instruction on Marriage and the Home yet in spite of all these resources Christians are walking away. They are walking away wilfully, openly, unashamedly without the slightest fear of God. What do we did to do ? Hear again what God has to say about His design for marriage. After all marriage is His invention. His blueprint is not complex. Do you know it ? Well, come back for a moment to (Gen 2:24-25) Notice, God's

blueprint has four aspects to it.

1. There must be Severance: “ *For this cause shall a man leave.*” Do you know why some marriages never work ? One or the other never leave home !
2. There must be Permanence: “ *And shall cleave.*”
3. There must be Unity: “ *And they shall be one flesh.*”
4. There must be Intimacy: (2:25)

Have you been tempted to walk away ? Do you see clearly God’s blueprint ? (a)

(b) FRIENDLESSNESS:

You see, on the way home they stopped at Gibeah. But there was no Holiday Inn there so they sat in the open square and waited for someone to offer them hospitality.

But no one did. (19:18) Finally, an old farmer from Ephraim took them in. Now this was a terrible breach of eastern hospitality. You see, in the east hospitality is a sacred duty. Residents of towns and villages were expected to entertain travellers in their homes.

(Gen 19:1) The absence of hospitality on the part of the Benjamites was another sign of apostasy.

Incidentally, did you know that the N.T. has a lot to say about hospitality ? God’s people are commanded to practice hospitality. Peter says, “ *Use hospitality one to another without grudging.*” (1 Pet 4:9) Its one of the qualifications for an elder that he “ *be given to hospitality.*” (1 Tim 3:2) His home must be open as a place of ministry to serve God ! Is your home open ?

(c) FILTHINESS:

Look at (19:22) “ *Sons of Belial,*” means “ *Sons of no profit,*” “ *sons of worthlessness.*” And these men wanted to have homosexual relationships with the Levite. The word “ *know,*” means to “ *have sexual experience with.*” These sinners were excited because there was a new man in town, and they wanted to enjoy him. It was Sodom and Gomorrah all over again. (Gen 19:28) What a picture of 21st century living. In our degenerate culture people who indulge in these vile passions are called “ *gay.*” They broadcast their shame on T.V. and radio. They are now given credibility by many line denominations who want to appoint them as their ministers. The new Archbishop of Canterbury sees no problem with them. But God does ! “ *Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind it is abomination.*”

(Lev 18:22 Rom 1:27) But do you see what happened here ? Like Lot, in Sodom, the host offered them his daughter, which shows the low estimate some men in that day had of women. How a father could offer his own daughter as a sacrifice to the lusts of a mob is difficult to understand. Yet many parents today allow their sons and daughters minds and hearts to be violated by what they see and hear on Television. My purity of mind and heart is essential for purity of the body.

(d) FORCEFULNESS:

For look at (19:24-25) This was gang rape the whole night through ! I mean what kind of man would

sacrifice his wife to save his own skin ? Was he punishing her for being unfaithful to him ? Why did these men not protect this woman ? Why was homosexual rape considered unthinkable while heterosexual rape was thought to be acceptable ? The bottom line was “ *every man did that which was right in his own eyes.* ” (21:25) My do you see what happens when a nation turns from God ? When spiritual anarchy prevails moral collapse is inevitable. (1)

(2) A REVENGE THAT IS PAINFUL

Can you picture the scene ? You see, by the time these evil Benjamites were finished with this woman she was dead. Then the Levite did a despicable thing, he divided her body into twelve parts sending one part to each of the twelve tribes of Israel. This had the desired effect as the tribes were mobilised to punish the men of Gibeah.

Look at (20:8-11) Now revenge is a deadly business. In an old cartoon show entitled “ *Amos and Andy,* ” Andy was being terrorised by a big man who would slap him on the chest. Andy had taken all he could, and he said to Amos “ *I’m going to put a stick of dynamite in my vest pocket and the next time he slaps me he is going to get his hand blown off.* ” Sure, but at the same time Andy’s own heart will be blown out. My that almost happened to Israel, as 400,000 men gathered at Mizpah, determined to deal with this sin. (20:17)

Note:

(a) The VOWS that were made INITIALLY:

Here was a time in Israel when they desperately needed God’s guidance. Civil war was at hand, but instead of turning to God for the answers they took three vows.

1. No one would go home until Gibeah is attacked and destroyed: (20:8)

2. Anyone who does not join forces against Gibeah will be killed: (21:5)

3. No one will allow his daughter to marry a Benjaminite. (21:2)

Then they sent a messenger to Benjamin, demanding that they turn over the evildoers, “ But the children of Benjamin would not hearken to the voice of their brethren.” (20:13 Deut 13:12-18) And (a) gave way:

(b) The VICTORY that was gained EVENTUALLY:

It did not seem like a very fair battle, 26,000 Benjaminites against 400,000 Israelites. But in spite of the terrible odds, it was brother fighting against brother.

You know, when God’s people refuse to obey God’s Word (Deut 22:25-26) and deal with sin, the results are always tragic. For all but 600 Benjaminites were slain.

(20:47) That brings us to the third part of the story:

(3) A RESTORATION THAT IS DECEITFUL

You see, all of a sudden the people woke up as to what was going on. They were about to wipe out completely

one of their tribes and leave a permanent gap in the nation. Do you see here:

(a) THE ATTITUDE OF ISRAEL:

In a typical way, they turned around and blamed God. Look at (21:2-3) They did what was right in their own eyes and having done so they turned around and blamed the Lord for what had happened. Have you ever done that ? So often as Christians we go on our own way, do our own thing, get ourselves in an awful mess and then we say, “ *Why has God allowed this to happen in my life ?* ” Doesn't God get blamed for an awful lot of things. It was a bit late to be turning to the Lord and this was hardly a prayer of repentance. The Israelites determined not to kill the last 600 Benjaminites, but now they had another problem. You see, they made a vow not to give any of their daughters to the men of Benjamin. How could the tribe continue without children ? They could not marry Gentiles, that was against the Law of Moses. (Deut 7:3) So what did they do ? Well, look at:

(b) THE ACTION OF ISRAEL:

First, they discovered that the remote northern area of Jabesh-Gilead had not sent any soldiers. They did not ask why. They just sent an army of 12,000 to kill everyone in the place, except unmarried girls. That provided 400 wives, but 200 more was needed. *Now some of you men here this have trouble finding one wife*, Israel were looking for 600 and now 200. Do you want to know how to get a wife ? Kidnap her ! Is that

not what these Benjaminites did ? There was a festival at Shiloh. So the rest of the tribes encouraged Benjamin to help themselves. With that business done, they went home. Several years ago an Oscar-winning film advertised its delights in the following way. “ *If violence, madness, rape, larceny, and bloodshed appeal to you, then see the best.* ” Millions did. Does this not illustrate the deep sickness of our society ? It is disgusting that Israel practised such perversions. Its worse that we not only practice them, we celebrate them in films and flock to see them for pleasure. Now the interesting thing about this story is that it had nothing to do with idolatry or Baal worship. It began with individuals ignoring the law of God, doing what was right in their eyes, and it led a nation into moral collapse. Now there is an important truth about sin in this story. Its this. We tend to think of sins as isolated acts, individual events which have no relationship one to another.

However, the Bible views sin organically. No sin was ever committed which affects one person alone. (Rom 5:12) Any sin sends ripples into society. There is an old story of a ship that was travelling across the Mediterranean, and one of the passengers cut a hole through the side of the ship. The sailors came to him and demanded to know what he was doing. “ *What difference does it make to you ?* ” he asked. “ *The hole's under my own bunk.* ” We live in a society where men go around shouting, “ *Do you own thing.* ” They demand the freedom to do what they please, when they please, and where they please. Then we under why the boat is filling up with water and we are beginning to go

under. Do you what recall the Bible says, “ *For none of us liveth to himself.*” (Rom 14:7) No man lives to himself and no man sins to himself. A woman’s sin led to a groups sin, led to a tribes sin, led to a nations sin. Where did Israel go wrong ? Where did the problem begin ?

(4) A REASON THAT IS HELPFUL

Look at (20:27-28) I want to suggest that the nation was in this hideous state of corruption because:

(a) GOD’S HOLINESS WAS NOT RECOGNISED:

Now don’t miss the significance of this statement in (20:26) Or “ *Then all the children of Israel, and all the people went up, and came unto Bethel.*” Now look at (20:27) Where was the Ark of the Covenant ? At Bethel ! Now from Joshua and Judges we know that the Tabernacle was in Shiloh, (Jos 18:1 Jud 18:31) and the Ark of the Covenant belonged in the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle in Shiloh. The Ark was intensely holy, and no one was to view it, except the High Priest once a year. (Heb 9:7) But the Holiness of God had been so cheapened that the High Priest had allowed it to be taken out of the Tabernacle and transported to Bethel, in direct disobedience to God. (a) My is this not why we live in a permissive society ? Is this not why we clutter our lives with sinful habits ? Is this not why we have lost a sense of reverence in the assembly ? A.W. Pink says, “ *We scarcely recognise Him, He seems to have lost His identity.*” (a)

(b) MANS ZEALOUSNESS WAS NOT REALISED:

What makes this doubly sad is that the priest was Phinehas, a man who once stood powerfully for God. When you think of Phinehas, what do you think of ? Zeal. You see in:

1. In (Num 25:7) *Phinehas has a Javelin in his Hand:* As he deals with sin in the camp of Israel.
2. In (Num 31:6) *Phinehas has a Trumpet in his Hand:* As he war’s against the Midianites. But now:
3. In (Jud 20:27) *Phinehas has Nothing in his Hand:* As he fails to speak out for God. And because he failed to speak out for God “ *every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*” (21:25) The Holy Ark was taken away from the Tabernacle. Had Phinehas run out of zeal ? Do you remember when you were strong for God ? The glow was in your heart ! My is your zeal dissipated ? Has your vision gone ? Have your standards slipped ? Are you a useless figurehead ? We are thinking this about “ *A Permissive Society.*” (1) (2) (3) (4)

(5) A REVIEW THAT IS NEEDFUL

There’s a three thousand year gulf between the times of the judges and our times. We wondered when we began our study of this book whether we could learn anything relevant from such a different world. Yet when we look more closely the gulf begins to shrink. We too live in a society without standards, we also live in a world where “ *everyone is doing that which is right in their own*

eyes.” Yet in the midst of such a society we can know:

(a) THE REALITY OF GOD’S CHARACTER:

We can know the power of God like Gideon, (7:34) Jephthah (11:29) Samson (13:25) as the Spirit of God takes control of our lives. We can know the grace of God. For our history is much like Israel’s. Cycle after cycle of sin, yet God’s arms are stretched out still to welcome the penitent supplicant. My I want to affirm at the beginning of the 21st century, that God is real and His resources are at our disposal. (a)

(b) THE RELEVANCY OF GOD’S WORD:

In the Book of Joshua, the Word of God was Central, in the Book of Judges the Word of God was Peripheral. (2:2) The reason for the success’s in Joshua was that they had respect for the Book, the reason for the failures in Judges was that they had disrespect for the book. The result ? Spiritual and moral anarchy. My morality what is right and wrong is not established by popular vote. I don’t care what all the psychologists, sociologists Hollywood producers and pop stars in the world say about right and wrong. *One millions words by them does not carry the authority of one word from God.*

These issues are determined by a holy God. To go back to our opening illustration, a unanimous vote taken by the passengers of a 747 that it is safe to take off does not make it safe, if the control tower says that it is not. Everyone in the cockpit of that Dutch 747 believed the pilot was doing the right thing. Everyone was wrong.

You see, our behaviour must be grounded on the moral absolutes of the Word of God. My this Book of Judges shows us (a) (b) and finally:

(c) THE REMEDY IN GOD’S KING:

For this Book of Judges not only foreshadows the evil of this present day, but it also give the reason. For the fourth time we are told (17:6 18:1 19:1) “ there was no king in Israel.” (21:25) Today, there is no king in Israel because the nation chose Barabbas instead of Christ. (Lk 23:13-35) They said, “ we will not have this man to reign over us.” (Lk 19:14) My evil, and lawlessness are rampant in this world, because the King has not come yet, but the fact that all is going so wrong down here, (2 Tim 3:1) is a sure sign of the nearness of His coming. You see, the only true remedy for the period of the Judges was the coming of the King, David who is mentioned in the next book. (Ruth) As it was then, so it is now. My we are on the threshold of the glorious reign of the Coming of the King whose right it is to reign ! (Jer 23:6) Listen, the King is Coming ! “ *For now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.*” (Rom 13:11)

**“ Where is the promise, the signs all say
His Coming is not far away
Rejoice ye saints, He may come today
He’s bound to come.”**

“ *Maranatha,*” the Lord is coming. (1 Cor 16:22)

Are you ready ? “ *Even so come, Lord Jesus.*”