Lesson 12: Moral Collapse and the True King

Teaching Outline — Rejecting God's rule produces destructive disorder
Passage: Judges 19-21 (KJV) | **Suggested teaching time:** 45 minutes
Key verse: "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes." (Judges 21:25)

Lesson objective

- Class will understand:
  - Rejecting God's rule produces destructive disorder
  - That disorder points us to Christ the true King

Timed introduction (0-5 minutes)

How Judges ends

- No triumphant deliverance
- A woman abused to death
- A tribe nearly destroyed
- Rash oaths
- Further violence
- The repeated verdict: "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (21:25)
- Intentionally hard to read
  - Don't soften their evil
  - Don't turn victims into plot devices
  - Don't make quick moral lessons from suffering

Not merely a stronger human ruler

- Israel had rejected the Lord's rule expressed in His covenant
- The refrain creates a longing for righteous leadership

- Later Scripture shows human kings also fail
- The deepest answer: Jesus Christ, the righteous King who:
  - Obeys God perfectly
  - Establishes justice without corruption
  - Gives Himself to save rather than exploit His people

Teach Judges 19 with care

- It concerns sexual violence
- State plainly:
  - The men of Gibeah committed grave evil
  - The Levite failed grievously in his duty of protection
- He “took his concubine, and brought her forth unto them” (19:25)
  - The text doesn’t say he slept while the assault occurred
  - Don’t add details Scripture doesn’t give
- **Read selected portions aloud:** Judges 19:1-10, 19:20-30, 20:12-28, 21:1-25

Context (5-9 minutes)

From corrupt worship to corrupt life together

- Judges 17-18: private shrines, an unauthorized priest, Dan’s stolen idolatry
- Chapters 19-21: corrupt life together
- “And it came to pass in those days, when there was no king in Israel.” (19:1)
- Worship of ch. 17 and brutality of chs. 19-21 belong together
- When people won’t submit to God’s Word, they don’t remain morally neutral
- Disorder spreads from private devotion into homes, towns, tribes, national life

Ancient setting is no excuse

- Unfamiliar cultural practices
- The narrator’s restraint is itself a condemnation
- Israel has become horrifyingly like the wicked cities it was meant to displace

Telling a terrible story truthfully

- A slower, more careful kind of teaching
- Not included to entertain, satisfy curiosity, or fuel speculation
- They expose human life when people reject God's rule
- Appropriate response: grief, moral clarity, prayer, deeper longing for the righteous King
- The woman in ch. 19 is not an illustration, object lesson, or background character
  - She is a victim of grave violence; name evil as evil
- Precision
  - Scripture tells enough to condemn the perpetrators, the Levite, Benjamin's protection of wrongdoing, and Israel's later responses
  - It doesn't give every private thought, moment of the night, or motive
  - Don't manufacture details to intensify a devastating story
  - When the text is silent, say so
  - Careful restraint isn't minimizing evil — it honors God's Word over our imagination

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Exposition (9-29 minutes)

1. Gibeah's evil and the Levite's failure (19:1-30)

The journey

- A Levite on the side of mount Ephraim travels to Bethlehemjudah for his concubine
- After delays at her father's house, the party leaves late
- He refuses to lodge in Jebus — a city of strangers
- Goes to Gibeah of Benjamin
- Painful irony: he expects safer treatment in an Israelite city
- The ordinariness makes the collapse more chilling
  - The covenant community has become morally like the nations
  - A name, ancestry, or religious history can't guarantee faithfulness
  - God's people must actually live under His Word

Gibeah's night

- No one receives them until an old man from mount Ephraim invites them in
  - Urges them not to spend the night in the street

- Hospitality was a serious obligation, but this isn't mainly about social customs
  - His welcome is a momentary contrast to the town's cruelty
- "the men of the city, certain sons of Belial, beset the house round about" and demand the Levite
- The old man calls it "this folly": "do not so wickedly" (19:23)
- Gibeah's crime deliberately recalls the wickedness of [BLANK: Sodom] (Gen 19)
- Covenant Israel resembles a city under divine judgment

The host's proposal and the Levite's act

- The host makes a shameful proposal involving his daughter and the Levite's concubine
  - Itself wicked — don't praise his recognition of evil while overlooking this
- The men refuse
- "But the men would not hearken to him: so the man took his concubine, and brought her forth unto them." (19:25)
- The Levite "took his concubine, and [BLANK: brought her forth]" to the violent men
- Those responsible for protection adopted the world's logic
  - Preserve oneself by sacrificing someone more vulnerable
- Betrayal, not leadership — a collapse of covenant responsibility

Morning

- The men abuse her through the night
- At dawn she falls at the door of the house
- He finds her there: "Up, and let us be going." There is no answer.
- Chilling callousness
  - Treats a suffering person as an obstacle to his journey
  - Don't turn his words into a dramatic reconstruction
  - No recorded compassion, protection, or confession
- Don't speculate about what he did through the night — Scripture doesn't say he slept
- What's revealed is enough

The summons

- He divides her body and sends the pieces through Israel's borders
- Horrific, but it summons national attention
- "Consider of it, take advice, and speak your minds" (19:30)

The victim is never blamed

- No excuse to perpetrators, no blame to the victim, no approval to the Levite
- No hint she caused it, deserved it, or exists to teach a lesson about her choices
- When abuse is disclosed, sinful communities often:
  - Examine the victim's conduct more than the offender's
  - Ask what the victim should have done differently
  - Focus on preserving powerful people's standing
- Judges 19 directs blame at the men who commit violence and the men who fail to protect
- Christian speech must be equally clear
- The chapter shows a collapse of human [BLANK: dignity]
  - Hospitality, protection, sexual integrity, and basic human dignity have collapsed

2. A demand for justice, yet a nation implicated in sin (20:1-28)

The assembly at Mizpeh

- Israel gathers "as one man"
- The Levite recounts the crime
  - Centers on what was done to him
  - Doesn't candidly confess his role
  - Names the crime without naming his own complicity
- Examine ourselves
  - We can be angry at public evil while editing our own stories
  - We can demand justice while refusing to admit where we harmed, failed, or benefited from another's vulnerability
  - Repentance requires truthful confession, not just accurate accusations
  - A community that can't confess its failures won't pursue justice cleanly

The right demand; Benjamin's refusal

- Deliver "the men, the children of Belial, which are in Gibeah, that we may put them to death, and put away evil from Israel" (20:13)
- Right — evil shouldn't be protected by tribal loyalty
- Benjamin refuses and gathers to fight
  - Twenty-six thousand warriors
  - Plus seven hundred chosen men of Gibeah
  - From among those two groups, seven hundred chosen left-handed men

- Instead of distinguishing the perpetrators from the tribe and cooperating in judgment, assembles an army
- Treats accountability as an attack on itself
- Benjamin chose tribal loyalty instead of [BLANK: justice]
- How institutions, families, churches, and nations magnify abuse
    - Group loyalty outranks truth, victims' safety, and discipline of wrongdoers

Loyalty and unity

- Loyalty is good: keeping lawful commitments, bearing burdens, not abandoning people
- It's corrupt when it requires lying, intimidation, or protecting serious sin
- Don't confuse unity with silence; biblical unity is unity in truth
- A church that does these isn't attacking itself:
    - Reports crimes when required
    - Follows lawful processes
    - Listens to victims
    - Disciplines credible wrongdoing

The battles (20:18-28)

- Counsel at the house of God: "Which of us shall go up first to the battle against the children of Benjamin?"
- "Judah shall go up first."
- Benjamin kills twenty-two thousand
- Next day Israel weeps, asks whether to fight again; Benjamin kills eighteen thousand more
- Then at the house of God: weep, fast, burnt offerings and peace offerings
- Through Phinehas: "Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease?"
- "Go up; for to morrow I will deliver them into thine hand" (20:28)

Why the defeats?

- The narrative doesn't give every reason — don't claim certainty where the text doesn't
- Neither Benjamin nor the rest of Israel stands above judgment
- The defeats remind all Israel that it remains under God's [BLANK: judgment]
- The nation seeking justice is part of the book's long rebellion
- Prevents moral superiority
    - Marked by idolatry, self-rule, and violence, it can't come as though it alone is righteous

- Even a just cause doesn't make sinful people pure

A correction for pursuing justice

- Don't be passive before evil
  - Gibeah's crime demands action; Benjamin's cover-up demands action
- Action must be joined to humility, truthfulness, lawful authority, and prayer
- Outrage alone isn't wisdom; it can become:
  - Exalting ourselves
  - Spreading unverified claims
  - Punishing beyond what's right
  - Treating every opponent as beyond mercy
- God loves justice and judges the motives and methods of those who seek it

The third day

- Israel uses an ambush, defeats Benjamin, destroys Gibeah
- A devastating count of the dead
- Six hundred Benjamites escape to the rock Rimmon
- Rightful concern for evil becomes a catastrophe of fraternal bloodshed

3. Rash vows multiply the damage (21:1-24)

Grief and an oath

- At the house of God: "O LORD God of Israel, why is this come to pass in Israel, that there should be to day one tribe lacking in Israel?" (21:3)
- Genuine grief; their oath creates another crisis
  - "There shall not any of us give his daughter unto Benjamin to wife" (21:1)
  - May have sounded resolute when made; leaves a problem they try to solve with more violence
- Shocking because it's family against family — Israel nearly eliminates one of its own tribes
- Rather than patiently seeking wisdom and mercy under God's law, they devise more destructive solutions
  - Trying to repair one disaster by creating another

Jabesh-gilead and Shiloh

- Jabesh-gilead didn't come to the assembly; they attack, sparing four hundred young women
  - Women taken from their homes

- Not enough for Benjamin
- The elders authorize seizing the daughters of Shiloh during a feast
- The text reports; it doesn't praise
- Those who began by opposing abuse now treat vulnerable women as a solution
  - Women again treated as means to a political end
- Israel's [BLANK: rash vows] made the restoration of Benjamin more destructive

Read Judges 21 carefully

- Concern that a tribe not be blotted out is understandable — one covenant people
- Sincere concern can't justify unjust means
- No clean human resolution — that's part of the message
- Sin doesn't stay contained; improvisation apart from God's rule produces new victims

Sin doesn't stay contained

- A lie may need another lie
- A rash promise may pressure us into injustice to avoid admitting foolishness
- A violent response creates fresh grief managed by greater violence
- Wisdom warns against hasty vows
- Repentance includes stopping, telling the truth, and not simply transferring harm

No tidy ending

- Not every consequence can be perfectly repaired in this life
- Resist forcing a tidy ending on a story that ends in moral wreckage
- Faithfulness sometimes means:
  - Admitting sin has made a situation grievously complex
  - Caring for those harmed
  - Pursuing every lawful good available
  - Refusing to call evil good because it seems expedient

4. The final refrain and the true need (21:25)

The refrain

- "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes."
- Explains the disorder
- Not an unqualified campaign slogan for human monarchy

- Israel later receives kings
  - 1 Samuel: a king like the nations can be a rejection of the Lord's kingship
  - Saul fails
  - David sins grievously
  - Solomon turns to idolatry
- Human monarchy can't finally cure the human heart

Self-rule isn't only individual

- Not modern individualism — filled with assemblies, armies, traditions, communal pressure
- The problem isn't too little social organization
- Individuals and groups alike reject God's authority
- A crowd can do what's right in its own eyes as readily as one person
- The opposite of self-rule isn't obeying preferred leaders or adopting community habits
  - It's joyful submission to the God who speaks
- His commands confront private desire and public consensus
  - Sexual faithfulness
  - Truthful witness
  - Impartial justice
  - Protection for the weak
  - Humble repentance
- We can't claim to honor the King while ignoring those He commands us to love

The legitimate longing

- God's people need righteous, accountable rule under God's Word
- A king who doesn't exploit the weak, protect evildoers, or solve one injustice with another
- God's people need [BLANK: righteous rule] under His Word, not self-rule
- Political power alone doesn't save
  - Later kings: fear, pride, violence, exploitation, idolatry
- The true need: a King whose heart is perfectly submitted to God
  - Judges without partiality
  - Uses power to serve rather than consume
- A hunger no ordinary judge or monarch can satisfy

> **Teacher note — care for the room:** Before discussion, remind the group that people present may have personal experience of abuse, coercion, or betrayal.
>
> - Do not invite anyone to disclose details publicly
> - Do not press a survivor for a response or use their story as a teaching example
> - If a disclosure occurs:
>   - Listen calmly
>   - Thank the person for speaking
>   - Prioritize immediate safety
>   - Follow applicable safeguarding and reporting requirements
> - Keep the conversation anchored in the text: abuse is evil, victims are not to blame, and God calls His people to truthful protection and justice

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Application (29-35 minutes)

1. **Reject the morality of "my own eyes"**
   - Personal conviction, social consensus, tribal loyalty, and strong emotion can't replace God's standard
   - Not cold legalism — God's Word commands justice, mercy, faithfulness, care for the vulnerable
2. **Churches and families must take allegations of abuse seriously**
   - Judges 19: men protecting themselves while a vulnerable person bears the cost
   - Christians must:
     - Listen carefully
     - Seek safety
     - Report crimes where required
     - Cooperate with proper civil authorities
     - Refuse to protect reputations at the expense of victims
   - Churches must protect the [BLANK: vulnerable] rather than conceal abuse
   - A church is never authorized to hide criminal abuse under the language of private reconciliation
3. **Pursue justice with humility**
   - Benjamin's refusal to discipline Gibeah is wicked
   - Righteous indignation can become uncontrolled vengeance
   - We need truth, due process, lawful authority, repentance, protection for victims, and a commitment not to create further harm

4. **Do not make rash promises**
    - Israel's oaths narrowed its choices and helped lead to more wrong
    - Keep lawful promises
    - Speak soberly; submit plans to God rather than committing dramatically in anger or panic
5. **Do not despair over the darkness Judges exposes**
    - The book is honest about sin so we'll stop looking for salvation in self-rule and seek the Lord's mercy

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Christ and the gospel (35-39 minutes)

The true King

- A need no flawed judge, priest, tribe, or ordinary king can meet
- Jesus doesn't do what's right in His own eyes
    - "I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29)
- Protects the weak, confronts hypocrisy, rules with perfect righteousness

Unlike every failed leader

- Unlike the Levite, He doesn't sacrifice the vulnerable to save Himself
- Unlike Israel's leaders, He doesn't use people as tools for a solution
- He gives Himself willingly to bear sin's judgment
- At the cross, justice and mercy meet
    - God doesn't ignore evil
    - God provides forgiveness for repentant sinners
- Jesus saves sinners through His [BLANK: atoning death] and resurrection

The call

- The gospel calls every one of us away from self-rule
- Repent, trust the risen Christ, submit to His good kingship
- His kingdom will bring the justice, peace, and restoration Israel's broken arrangements couldn't

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Discussion (39-43 minutes)

Discussion questions

1. How does the deliberate echo of Genesis 19 deepen the horror of Gibeah's sin?
2. What does the text explicitly say about the Levite's actions, and what details should we avoid inventing?
3. Why was Benjamin's tribal loyalty morally corrupt?
4. How do the events in Judges 21 show that one sin can generate further injustice?
5. What should Christian communities do when abuse is alleged or disclosed?
6. Why does Judges 21:25 point beyond self-rule without making every human monarchy the final answer?
7. How does Jesus differ from every failed leader in Judges?

Closing prayer (43-45 minutes)

> **Closing prayer:** "Righteous Lord, we grieve the evil and suffering this passage reveals. Forgive our self-rule, our silence before injustice, and our attempts to solve wrong by further wrong. Protect the vulnerable and give Thy church courage, wisdom, truthfulness, and mercy. Rule our hearts through Jesus Christ, the true King who gave Himself for sinners and will make all things right. Amen."