Israel had no King

Judges 19:1-21:25

“In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit."(21:25)

For the last 16 weeks we have studied the book of Judges. I can still remember the first message as if it was delivered yesterday; about Caleb who absolutely kept God’s command to drive the Canaanites out of Canaan. Do you remember that? Sadly, however, after Joshua and Caleb’s death, we saw how the Israelites gradually forsook the LORD as their King. Up to the time period of the first verse of today’s passage. Look at 19:1. It reads, in those days Israel had no king. The phrase: *in those days*, refer to the time the events in today’s passage took place. In those days, the Israelites had no king. This does not only mean that Israel did not have a political king. It more specifically means that the Israelites openly **rejected the LORD as their king**. Instead of worshipping the LORD and obey Him only, **everyone did what he saw fit**. That does not sound too bad; right? I mean, is that not exactly what people are also doing these days. The truth is, a life without God as our king, is a life destined for moral depravity, chaos and destruction. Today’s passage vividly illustrates this. In a time when Israel openly rejected God as their king, we read about rampant homosexuality, rape, abuse, murder, callous indifference, death of an innocent woman and a deadly civil war. It does not sound much different from what you and I see, hear and personally experience in our daily lives today. I wonder why? It is because, people today also reject the Lord as their King, just like the Israelites. Today, let’s sincerely repent for also rejecting the LORD as our King. Also, let us make a decision to no longer do whatever we see fit. But deeply accepting the LORD Jesus as our King, by obeying His word absolutely in our lives. Amen.

Let’s look at verse 1.There was an Israelite man, a Levite living deep in the hill country of Ephraim. One day, this Levite, took a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. But soon after their marriage, the woman was unfaithful to the Levite. Finally, she left him and went back to her father’s house in Bethlehem, Judah. But 4 months later, her husband (the Levite) went to her and successfully persuaded her to return home with him. When they were near Jebus, an alien city, the day was almost gone. But not wanting to stay among the Canaanites, the Levite walked further to Gibeah in Benjamin; an Israelites town. There he expected a Benjamite brother would take them into his home. But surprisingly, they waited and waited….until they were the only ones left in the city square. No one took them into his home for the night.

Fortunately, later that evening an old man, from the same hill country in Ephraim the Levite came from, and who was living in Gibeah, came in from his work in the fields. Unlike the Benjamites, this old man warmly welcomed the Levite, his concubine and servant into his house. He graciously fed his donkeys and after they had washed their feet, gave them something to eat and drink. (21) But while they were enjoying themselves, something surprisingly happen **AGAIN**. Look at verse 22. (DOEFDOEFDOEF!!) Someone pounded on the door. Who is that? Then they heard men shouting: “Bring out the man who came to your house so we can have sex with him.” ‘*What!? Is this for real?!*’ the Levite asked. ‘*First the people of this town refused to take me into their home, and now they want to have sex with me?! Is this an Israelite town? Is this really Gibeah of the Benjamites? Or did I enter a Canaanite town?*’ But they were indeed in Gibeah of the Benjamites. And it was some of the wicked men of the city who surrounded the old man’s house.

Look at verses 23. The owner of the house went outside and said to them, “No, my friends, don’t be so vile. …. don’t do this disgraceful thing. The old man **then** made an alternative suggestion to them having sexual relations with the Levite; yet it was just as disturbing. He said (Look at verse 24): Look, here is my virgin daughter, and his concubine. I will bring them out to you now, and you can use them and do to them whatever you wish. But the men would not listen to him. (25) They did not want the virgin girl, but the Levite man. At this the Levite remained inside the house and then did the unthinkable! Look at verse 25b-26. He took his concubine and sent her outside to them. Then the wicked men raped her and abused her throughout the night, and at dawn they let her go. At daybreak the woman went back to the house where her master was staying. She was so badly injured, that she fell down at the door with her hands on the threshold. There she died. Yet oblivious to her pain and suffering, the Levite slept peacefully all night. And the next morning when he opened the door and saw his concubine fallen in the doorway; he callously said to her, “Get up; let’s go.” As if nothing happened…… But there was no answer. Then the man put her on his donkey and set out for home.

Look at verse 29. (Read) Why would the Levite do such a horrible, disrespectable and inhumane thing? It was because his heart was full of bitterness towards the wicked men who took his concubine from him. Not because, he loved his concubine so much. For as we can see, to him she was nothing more than a possession he owned. No! He was full of selfish anger and bitterness, for the perceived injustice the men committed against him. With this bitterness and anger, the Levite cut his concubine into pieces and sent her body parts to all the areas of Israel – to shock and thereby provoke them to take action against his enemies. This shows just how morally depraved this Levite was.

We may ask ourselves: did all of this really happen in Israel? It sounds like things that could only happen among the perverted Canaanites….or perhaps took place in Sodom or Gomorrah? Do you remember how wicked the men and women were who lived in these towns? They were so notorious for their perversion and wickedness that the Lord rained down burning sulphur from heaven to kill them. (Gen 19:13, 24-25) Sadly, the answer is, these things really did happen in Israel; among the people of God. This goes to show just how far the people in Israel had fallen away from the LORD. Once the Israelites rejected the LORD as their king, they became as morally corrupt and evil as the wicked Canaanites and perverted Sodomites. If not worse!

Look at 19:30. When people in Israel received the concubine’s limbs, they were understandably alarmed, saying “Such a thing has never been seen or done…. Think about it! Consider it! Tell us what to do!”  We can be certain, that this was not the first time that an innocent woman died such a cruel and painful death in Israel; whether among the Israelites or the Canaanites. In fact, equally disturbing crimes like the offering of children to Baal happened all the time. Also lewd acts of prostitution in the worship of the goddess Ashtoreth were rampant in Canaan, since the day Israel conquered the land. Yet, the Israelites did absolutely nothing about it. However, after hearing the Levite’s false account of what happened to his concubine, the Israelites pretended to all of a sudden be so concerned about the evil crime committed in Gibeah. Look at 20:12-13. “What about this awful crime that was committed among you? Now surrender those wicked men of Gibeah so that we may put them to death and purge the evil from Israel.”

But the Benjamites would not listen to their fellow Israelites. Like their Israelite brothers, they too were not really concerned about the terrible sins and crimes that were committed in their land. In fact, they seemed to have rather enjoyed living sinful lives apart from God. Yet, out of pure stubbornness and pride, they came together in large numbers at Gibeah to fight against their Israelite brothers. And with this…… a bloody and unnecessary civil war broke out between the tribes of Israel. During the first two battles, the Benjamites cut down 40 000 Israelite soldiers. But then, at the third attempt and with the approval from the LORD, the Israelites inflicted heavy losses on the Benjamites, and finally defeated them. In fact, in their rage the Israelites kept on pressing against their brothers until they completely annihilated the Benjamites’ army, killing about 25 000 valiant soldiers and leaving only 600 survivors. Yet, the Israelites did not stop there.After the battle the men of Israel went back to the territory of Benjamin to commit genocide! Look at verse 48. They put all the towns to the sword, killing all the women and children. They even butchered the animals and everything else they found. All the towns they came across they set on fire. Until absolutely no one or nothing in Benjamin was left alive or standing. **Did this brutal attack of rage by any means solve the sin problem among the Israelites? Absolutely not. It was a senseless war that only revealed the extent of Israel’s moral depravity. Also, it left the Israelites with a bigger problem.**

Look at 21:16-17. And the elders of the assembly said, “With the women of Benjamin destroyed, how shall we provide wives for the men who are left? The Benjamite survivors must have heirs,” they said, “so that a tribe of Israel will not be wiped out. At first glance, this does not look like a big problem. For surely the Israelites could simply give their daughters to the remaining Benjamites men as their wives and future mothers of the Benjamites. But unfortunately, this was not possible. Look at verse 18. We can’t give them our daughters as wives, since we Israelites have taken this oath: ‘Cursed be anyone who gives a wife to a Benjamite. For the past 400 years the Israelites never kept an oath. Yet when they suddenly decided to keep an oath…….the oath turned out to be such a foolish one that they could easily have set aside before the LORD. But instead of doing so, they opted to keep their oath instead. And the way they did so is unthinkable. The leaders of Israel sent 12 000 soldiers to Jabesh Gilead who mercilessly annihilate a whole town of innocent men, women and children. And for what? To kidnap 400 virgins and give them as wives to the Benjamites. What madness! But they were still 200 wives short. So they came up with another sly scheme. This time, they instructed the Benjamites to go and hide in the vineyards during the annual festival of the LORD in Shiloh. When the girls of Shiloh came out to join in the dancing, then the Benjamites were to rush from the vineyards and each seize a wife from the girls of Shiloh and go to the land of Benjamin. This was a brilliant plan, because by abducting the women like this, the fathers of the abducted women were innocent of breaching the foolish oath that no Israelite should give his daughter to a Benjamite. Look at verse 23.So that is what the Benjamites did. While the girls were dancing, each man caught one and carried her off to be his wife. Then they returned to their inheritance and rebuilt the towns and settled in them.

We may ask ourselves: Why were all the Israelites so evil even though they were the chosen people of God? Let’s read today’s key verse together, verse 25. “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit. Israel’s fundamental problem….their core problem that evoke all this evil and wickedness among them, was the fact that they had no king. Here, no king does not only mean that the Israelites did not have a political king. It more specifically means that the Israelites rejected the LORD as their king; who had authority to direct every aspect of their lives with His life giving words. But they rejected God’s word. Instead, everyone did as he saw fit.

**The Benjamites** in Gibeah saw it fit not to welcome strangers into their homes. **The wicked men in Gibeah** saw it fit to engage in homosexual relations. They even saw it fit to call out a Levite late at night to have sex with them. More than that, they saw it fit to brutally rape and abuse an innocent girl until she died of her injuries. **The old man in Gibeah** was equally evil; as he saw it fit to send his young virgin daughter out to these vulgar rapists. **What about the Levite?** He saw it fit to protect his own life by sending out his concubine to a pack of sexual predators. He saw it fit to sleep peacefully the whole night, only to heartlessly tell his dead concubine to “Get up, let’s Go!” He then saw it fit to take personal revenge on the killers of his concubine by chopping her body up and so provoke all of Israel to come out and make war with Benjamin. He also saw it fit to lie to the leaders of Israel what really happened that night in Gibeah. **The Benjamites** were equally sinful. They saw it fit to choose tribal loyalty over obedience to God. **The leaders of Israel were not any better**. For they failed to acknowledge that what happened in Gibeah was no different from what happened amongst them. That they were equally sinful to the very people they now came out to condemn through warfare. Therefore, they saw it fit to not only completely annihilate the brave Benjamite army, but to commit genocide by killing every Benjamite man, woman, child and even animal. Then they saw it fit to keep two foolish vows, wipe out a whole clan from Israel and abduct 400 virgin wives for the Benjamites. **Collectively, all of these bad choices the Israelites made and all the wicked things they saw fit was the culmination of 400 years of rejecting the LORD as their God.** With every year passing, the Israelite’s hearts grew darker and darker…immorally more corrupt by the day until…things got so bad in and among them that the events of today’s passage took place.

**It seems easy for us to look down on these Israelites; and to think that we are not as bad as them. The truth is you and I are no different from the wicked men in Gibeah, the cowardly father, the heartless Levite, the obstinate Benjamites and the bloodthirsty Israelites. In one way or another, we are like them and capable of doing exactly what they did. The things we do and the decisions we take are most of the times also things that seem fit to us personally, yet fall way short of God’s perfect standards and will for our lives. But this is exactly why sinful men and women like you and me, like the wicked men in Gibeah, the old man, the Levite and the Israelites of the time, all need a King in our lives.**

**We need a king to break us free from the bondage of our sin. A king who can cleanse our hearts and our minds from all the immoral filth that lives in us. A king who Himself overcame the passions and temptations of this world, and so is able to sympathize and help us live new lives in obedience to God. A king so strong, that nothing can stop Him; not even death. A king who reigns eternally with fairness and justice and whose kingdom has no end. (Isaiah 9:6-7)**

**Is there such a king for you and me? Yes there is. His name is Jesus Christ; God’s one and only son and our LORD. As we learned at the conference, Jesus was innocent and without sin. Yet, He was slaughtered like a Passover Lamb, and crucified on the cross to die a substitutionary death for you and me. By His blood, and his blood only, are sinners like you and me forgiven of all our sin. More than that, we are set free from bondage of sin. So that we are no longer enslaved by our passions and desires, but can overcome them to stop doing what we see as fit…but actually do what the LORD see as fit. How can Jesus become our personal King? Through faith in His death and resurrection.**

**But why is it that despite believing in Jesus, that we still struggle to obey Him in certain areas of our life? Why do we do this? Why in some areas do we persist in doing what we see fit, instead of following the LORD’s clear will? It is simply because, we have not sincerely and deeply accept that Jesus truly is King; who has all authority to direct my life and your life as He sees fit. Obedience to Jesus’ will does not come automatically after we have been saved. Obedience comes with firm commitment and devotion to Jesus’ word. This requires us to work daily at coming the LORD’s word, accept it in our hearts and then practically live by it in our daily lives. Only then, with His word in our hearts and obedience in our lives, can Jesus reign as King within you and me. Only then can Jesus renew our broken hearts and lives. Only then can Jesus lead us to live a life that is pleasing to God, and according to His perfect will for you and me. Today, let’s sincerely repent for also rejecting the LORD as our King. Let us make a firm decision to stop doing whatever we see as fit. And let us deeply accept the LORD Jesus as our King by wholeheartedly obey His will for our lives. Amen.**