

OF BULL'S-EYES AND MISSES

Judges 19:22-30

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I have a 50-year-old friend who grew up as a missionary kid in Africa, and as a boy, he used to hunt birds for food by putting a stone in an old-fashioned sling, similar to the one with which David killed the giant Goliath. He was so good with that sling that he could hit a four inch by four inch target from fifty feet every time.

Now imagine you had a sling, and you were in a slingshot competition that used four inch exploding targets, set at fifty foot distances. No matter how hard you hit the target, with the slightest nick of the stone, the target would explode. So there would be no question during the competition whether someone had nicked the target. The object of the competition was to explode as many targets as you could in one minute, making lots of noise. Note that silence in this event was not a good sign.

In an event like this, it wouldn't matter if you missed the target by one foot or 3,000th of an inch. If you missed the target, there would be silence. The heavens would not applaud. In this case, that old expression, "a miss is as good as a mile" fits. A miss is a miss, no matter how close you come.

Interestingly, there is a Hebrew word that describes this very event. It is the word for "sin," and it literally means "to miss the mark." The verbal form of the word for sin is used in the Bible to describe someone using a sling to throw a stone and missing a target. The Biblical target is correctly understanding and obeying God's directives. When we obey God, heaven explodes with applause. When we miss, or disobey God's directives, silence reigns. Hence in God's economy, a miss is a miss. All sin is equal in that it is a miss. It matters not in God's eternal justice whether the miss was minor or major. Sin's eternal outcome is the same: eternal separation from God, unless one puts their trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and receives God's forgiveness, acceptance, and approval regardless of how much the mark was missed.

But in another temporal sense, not all sin is the same. For example, let's go back to the sling throwing competition. Imagine for a moment a crowd is surrounding the arena in which the stones are being thrown. They crowd in, watching from both sides and from behind the sling throwers. Suddenly, an experienced sling thrower accidentally releases too early and it goes behind him, travelling at the speed of five hundred feet per second. It immediately hits someone in the audience and kills them. Although unintended, the miss would have added to it the collateral damage of someone dying. In this case, not all misses are the same. This miss has a greater temporal effect, because it hurts someone else. The point is that this side of heaven, not all misses, not all sins are equal. More often than not, our sin has a major impact on others. That will be a huge lesson from our study of **Judges 19** this morning.

But before I get there, allow me to give you an expanded definition of sin that I hope will be more helpful in a practical sense. One of the best ways to explain what the Bible means when it uses the word “**sin**” is “having an attitude of active rebellion or passive indifference to God and to what God says.”

For example, years ago there was no visible traffic speed sign out in front of our church on M Street. When I first drove down the street, I did not know what the speed limit was. Quite frankly, I really didn't care. I just figured, with passive indifference, that I would use my own judgement as to what was safe. Thirty years ago, 45 mph seemed safe enough to me. But then one day a speed limit sign was posted. It said 35 mph. When it went up, I asked a police officer, “Has that always been the speed limit?” He said it had been. I quickly realized that by my passive indifference I had been violating the law. From that point on, since I knew for sure what the limit was, if I chose to drive 45 mph, I would be demonstrating active rebellion against the law.

The same is true when it comes to our God-given consciences and God's directives spelled out in Scripture. If I choose to ignore what I know God says is correct, and do whatever I want, I am in sin. It is active rebellion. If I drive on streets that have a speed limit of which I am not sure, but nonetheless I speed because I don't care to find out what the speed limit is, that is sin. It is passive rebellion--I don't care what God thinks--I am going to do whatever I want.

Based on that definition, God's Word is correct. We have all sinned. There is not one who has never lived as though God weren't there and didn't do whatever he pleased. All of us are guilty of being sinners. And without trusting in the Savior, none have any hope of spending eternity with God.

Whether it is by active rebellion and doing what we know to be wrong, or passive indifference and not caring to know if it is wrong, sin is to live as if there is no God and that He has not specified instructions about how to live.

This morning we are going to see in our study of the book of **Judges** that the collateral damage of sin, its effect on the innocent, is huge. Furthermore, we will see that **chapter 19** covers the gamut of the various intensities of sin and its effects on those around us. But as we do, keep in mind that what may appear to be a major or minor sin to us, due to how it affects the lives of others, is of little significance to God, because all misses are misses. The ultimate result of all sin is separation from God. Hence, if you don't see your sins in this chapter, don't become self-righteous and think you are better than others, whose sin may appear to you more grievous than your own. For should you, more than likely you would feel freer to condemn others around you based on your standard, rather than God's holy and perfect standard of "a miss is a miss."

The events from our passage of study today contain all of the details that our entertainment industry declares to be the stuff upon which all "must see" movies are made: anger, violence, betrayal, deception, sex, and even rape. If this chapter were to be made into a modern movie, it would be rated at least an "R."

Unfortunately, because many in our generation, including Christians, continually watch these kinds of things, we have become so desensitized to the spiritual and moral state of our nation today that we are rarely shocked or outraged by the news of the day's events. Some of you may read this chapter and it may not rile you at all. I was glad to hear from one of you who read this chapter, took it seriously, and had your sleep disturbed, for that means your God-given conscience is not dead but more alive than others' consciences.

Like Israel during this period of the judges, the moral state of our nation today

is the result of our turning away from the Lord and disowning our Christian heritage. We have kicked the Lord out of our public educational system. We have kicked Him out of every single aspect of our governing, legislature, and laws. Patrick Henry (1736-1799), one of our nation's founding fathers, once said, "It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great nation was founded not by religionists, but by Christians; not on religions, but on the gospel of Jesus Christ!" However today, America is a post-Christian nation, and though polls show that a large percentage of people say that they believe in God and are born again, many are proud of the fact that our nation no longer is steered by our Judeo-Christian beliefs. The fact is, however, that we should be governed by a Judeo-Christian ethic, not political correctness.

As we return to this chapter, I remind you of the observation that was made last week. The writer of **Judges** has omitted any reference to God in this introductory chapter to the fate of the tribe of Benjamin. He does so to illustrate what people can be like when they live as though there is no God. There is not one hint of God's fingerprint of approval upon the tribe of Benjamin's action throughout these three chapters.

The final chapters of **Judges** are a vignette of the Israeli daily life shortly (twenty to forty years) after Joshua's conquest of the Promised Land. The people involved in the chapter were first and second generation Israeli settlers. The motto of this generation was, "**Every man did that which was right in his own eyes.**" This selfish, hedonistic, "look out for yourself only" mentality eventually infected the family, the faith community, the city, and the nation. They had refused to heed God's Word. It was deemed too rigid, too intrusive, and too cumbersome for the life of ease and pleasure they worshipped. If you were living during those days, and you took seriously God's guidelines for living, you would have been mocked and condemned for being politically incorrect, intolerant, and not in keeping with the times. Life would have been so much easier if you would just look the other way, join the crowd, and live as if there were no God, forgetting the fact that this first generation of Promised Land dwellers had received what God had promised them before they entered the land!

Look with me at God's Words given to Israel on the banks of the Jordan River just before they crossed over into the Promised Land. We read in **Deuteronomy 6:10-15** these words:

¹⁰Then it shall come about when the LORD your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you great and splendid cities which you did not build, ¹¹and houses full of all good things which you did not fill, and hewn cisterns which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant, and you eat and are satisfied, ¹²then watch yourself, that you do not forget the LORD who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ¹³You shall fear only the LORD your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name. ¹⁴You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you, ¹⁵for the LORD your God in the midst of you is a jealous God; otherwise the anger of the LORD your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you off the face of the earth.

God warned them that the blessings they were going to receive could lead them away from remembering Who gave it to them and why He gave it to them. If they failed to practice the statutes he set out for them, their love and worship for God would fade. They would fall in love with the gifts and not the giver. But to do so, God warned the people, would lead to their destruction. And what we are looking at this morning is one small sample of the destruction we can bring upon ourselves when we don't pay attention to our relationship with God.

Last week, we began our examination of the fall of the tribe of Benjamin, in **chapter 19**. In the first twenty-one verses, we saw the social outrage over the

lack of genuine hospitality.

In the latter half of our study last time we witnessed the turnabout in hospitality for the Levite and his wife by the old man from Ephraim. The old man's hospitality led this couple to share a celebration meal together with what once were strangers from the same homeland of Ephraim but quickly become friends. As we will see in a moment, this celebration carried on into the evening when suddenly, it was turned into a horrifying unspeakable event. The response to this event brought moral outrage, the likes of which the nation of Israel had never seen before or since. The consequences of the sins of a few individuals led to the near destruction of one entire tribe in Israel.

But again, God's heart was broken long before this event by the sins of the people--less showy sins than these, but just as much "missing the mark by a mile." God's heart had been broken long before this. He had been enduring and weeping over their growing apostasy for years.

We read:

²²While they were celebrating, behold, the men of the city, certain worthless fellows, surrounded the house, pounding the door; and they spoke to the owner of the house, the old man, saying, "Bring out the man who came into your house that we may have relations with him."

The Hebrew expression "**worthless fellows**" remains uncertain, but the sense is clear enough. These were perverse individuals who paid no regard to either God's Law or the acceptable norms of human conduct. The Hebrew root word used here, "Belial," later became a popular name for Satan.

Not only the words but also the actions of these "**worthless fellows**" must have been frightening to all within the house; for the Hebrew word "**pounding**," according to the long highly regarded Hebrew scholar, S. R. Driver, pictures not just knocking hard, but dashing themselves against the

door and hurling themselves on the door in an attempt to break it down and gain an entrance.

“²³Then the man, the owner of the house, went out to them and said to them, ‘No, my fellows, please do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not commit this act of folly.’”

Understanding the two Hebrew expressions **“wickedly”** and **“act of foolishness”** is critical for correctly interpreting the crimes perpetrated in this event. Some of the more liberal commentators try to hide or downplay the blatant sinful immorality mentioned here or even deny that it happened as recorded, but for those who take the Bible to be God’s literal word, the Hebrew meaning is quite clear. The expression that refers to the demand of the men to give over the Levite for homosexual gang rape is “to do evil.” This expression is used to deliberately link the Gibeahites’ behavior with the refrain that is repeated twice in these last chapters: **“The Israelites did what is evil in the sight of the LORD,”** and **“Each person did what was right in his own eyes.”**

The second expression, the **“act of foolishness,”** denotes emptiness and vanity, without moral, spiritual, or reasonable restraint.

With the old man having rebuked these men, the reader is hopeful that things would settle down. However, the old man proposed an alternative that was **“right in his own eyes,”** but the reader is quickly shocked to discover what his alternative is. The old man suggested, **“²⁴Here is my virgin daughter and his [the Levite’s] concubine. Please let me bring them out that you may ravish them and do to them whatever you wish. But do not commit such an act of folly against this man.”**

At this point, you might be asking yourself, “How could a father offer his own daughter to be gang raped by these men?” Yet I ask you in return, “Aren’t many parents today doing the same thing when they allow and even encourage the minds and hearts of their sons and daughters to be violated by what they see and hear in movies, on television, and at rock concerts? There is an old term rarely used these days. It is the word “chastity,” which describes the moral, sexual protection, and nurturing of oneself. This moral sexual protection begins in the mind and heart. Parents, chastity of mind and heart

leads to chastity of the body. But if you feed the heart with that which is evil, pretty soon the heart and the ability to discern evil from good will become dull and insensitive to what God clearly declares is evil.

Of this hard-to-grasp situation that dishonors women like few others, the commentators Cundall and Morris write:

In his concern for the accepted conventions of hospitality, the old man was willing to shatter a code which, to the modern reader, appears of infinitely more importance, namely, the care and protection of the weak and helpless. Womanhood was but lightly esteemed in the ancient world; indeed it is largely due to the precepts of the Jewish faith, and particularly the enlightenment which has come through the Christian faith, that women enjoy their present position.

Jesus Christ and the teachings of Paul elevated the value of womanhood to a height not known or accepted up until the first century. But next verse takes us even deeper into astonishment, when we read:

²⁵But the men would not listen to him. So the man [the Levite, not the old man] seized his concubine [leaving his host's virgin daughter untouched] and brought her out to them; and they raped her and abused her all night until morning, then let her go at the approach of dawn. ²⁶As the day began to dawn, the woman came and fell down at the doorway of the man's house where her master [her Levite husband] was, until full daylight.

The Levite himself, with a greater concern for his own skin, took his concubine by force and thrust her out the door like one tosses a scrap of meat to dogs. Mind you, this is the same guy who spent the previous three days trying to reconcile his marriage relationship and bring his wife home!

Thankfully, the writer of **Judges** does not dwell on the harrowing details of the woman's suffering, but if ever a human being endured a night of utter horror, it was the Levite's concubine.

You may be thinking, "How callous of that man!" But look what happens next. We haven't seen anything yet!

²⁷When her master arose in the morning and opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way [not to look for his concubine but to leave without her], then behold, his concubine was lying at the doorway of the house with her hands on the threshold.

The man stumbled over her dead body on the front door step. With her last bit of physical strength after the night's ordeal, the woman crawled home, collapsing with her hands on the threshold, reaching for the protection of her husband, reaching for the security of their host's house, reaching--but all she could grasp was death. These verses don't clearly state that she died at this point, but **20:4-6** leaves no room for doubt.

But the Levite thought she was still alive, and without any hint of compassion or concern, instructed her to, "²⁸**Get up and let us go, but there was no answer. Then he placed her on the donkey [like a sack of potatoes]; and the man arose and went to his home.**" Now it is easier for us to understand why this woman left him earlier (**verse 2**).

I can't help but contrast this Levite's treatment of his concubine with what we will be studying next in the book of **Ruth**, and how the man Boaz, a true believer and one who knew God, treated both Naomi and Ruth. As a man of faith, Boaz had not forgotten that when God created woman, He created her in the image of God. Thus, she is to be treasured, valued, honored, cherished,

and nourished. And whether we are men or women, we are called to recognize that God created us both, together, to give us a more complete understanding of Who He is.

“²⁹**When he entered his house** [about two days later], **he took a knife and laid hold of his concubine and cut her in twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout the territory of Israel.**” He desecrated her body, treating her as if it were an animal carcass. In that culture, the treatment people gave a corpse reflected their respect, or lack of respect, for the dead person. He should have given her a proper burial. It ought to take our breath away that when his wife was alive, he treated her with a lack of respect; and now that she was dead, he treated her in a horrendous manner.

³⁰**All who saw it** [meaning the individual pieces of this woman’s butchered remains] **said, “Nothing like this has ever happened or been seen from the day when the sons of Israel came up from the land of Egypt to this day. Consider it, take counsel and speak up!”**

The Israelites perceived this incident as the greatest act of moral corruption in their nation’s history. It called for a reaction and a reaction it got. The final statement, “**Consider it, take counsel and speak up,**” according to extra Biblical literature, was a call to arms for the whole nation of Israel to confront the entire tribe of Benjamin for this atrocity.

Remember, this is not some fictitious Charles Dickens novel; this was a real historical event that the writer of **Judges** is documenting! It is incomprehensible that anyone, let alone this generation of God’s chosen people who were first to live amongst God’s blessings, could ignore Him and treat God’s gift of sexuality, meant for a husband and wife within marriage, so corruptly. And then, to have a man from the tribe of Levi, the tribe that was to stand up for God and the Laws of God, do what he did to anyone, let alone his wife, was horrid. For a town without restraint to first reject and then attack innocent visitors in this manner was unconscionable.

Unfortunately, our own US society is filled with much the same abhorrent

immorality, and yet people feel quite free in defending it. Some of them are very suave and articulate, and are charismatic spokespersons of various lifestyles and practices. The fact of the matter is that today there can scarcely be found a perversion that someone is not willing to stand up and defend as an essential to human freedom. And that shouldn't surprise you if you are looking closely at God's Word, because that's exactly how Paul describes the downfall of a society that suppresses the truth about God and His instructions for life. In the first chapter of Paul's letter to the **Romans**, he spells out for us how a depraved society will knowingly disregard what is right and support that which is wrong. It might surprise you how up-to-date Paul's 2000-year-old letter is. He writes:

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, . . . and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

Romans 1:28, 32.

It's is not just that the mistaken individuals tolerate such improper activities, but they give hearty support and approval to those who do.

Friends, those are not my words, but they are the Holy Spirit-inspired words of God, found in the Bible. Although some have used them inappropriately to condemn and revile others, they are not words of hate, but words of explanation and warning. The question we need to be asking ourselves is, "Do we want to see what happened in our text happen to our country? To people we dearly love?"

As Christians, we are called to be ambassadors of Christ, clear explainers to others of His message of the Gospel. Hence, when dealing with confused and deceived individuals like these, how do we best represent Jesus? By doing what Jesus did. Jesus clearly practiced the balance of grace and truth. He

declared the truth of what was sin, and at the same time graciously offered the gift of forgiveness and the healing of past hurts and wounds, sometimes self-inflicted due to foolish choices. He then offered the power to transform your mind and life through the truth of God's Word and the work of the Holy Spirit. Hence, as ambassadors of Jesus Christ, we speak the Gospel to others both in grace and truth.

Because many today who claim to be followers of Christ no longer esteem the Bible as the last word on right and wrong, we have allowed ourselves to be absorbed into an immoral culture, searing our God-given consciences, just like the Israelites in Gibeah.

Today, because of the total moral disorientation due to the suppression of the truth about God, added to the lie of moral relativism that denies anyone has the ability to know truth, our children and young people are growing up not knowing what is right and what is wrong. They are confused about:

Is it wrong to lie, steal, or dishonor my parents? Some don't know when they are lying or stealing, because people have relabeled thievery as "shop lifting."

Some kids are so confused about human sexuality that by the time they become adults, many are asking, "Am I really a boy or a girl?"

So many, even some who have grown up in church, have no direction in these areas, and it is wreaking havoc in their lives, as it did in the town of Gibeah.

The lesson I take away from this episode that God has included in His Word is that when the people of God disregard the intended literal interpretation and application of God's Word to their lives, they not only bring ruin upon themselves, but their evil rebellion can infect their families, their neighbors, their churches, their schools, and their communities.

But it only takes one person to choose to do what is right, make a difference, and build a bridge to the lost and struggling, a bridge to the Savior who can be a refuge in their dark hour. Others like the three individuals who lived during this very same period of the judges, Naomi, Boaz, and Ruth, lived an entirely different story. May God's Word be a light unto our path. May the love of Jesus Christ be lived out through our lives as we practice living and speaking truth and grace with all with whom we come in contact.

