

HER BODY WAS BROKEN  
JUDGES 19:1-20:11  
FEBRUARY 22, 1987

Page 1

She had no name. She had no rights and no protection. Throughout history, women rarely have had rights equal to those of men, but usually they have had some form of protection. The unnamed woman in the story in Judges, chapter 19, had nothing. The two main characters of the story were polarized because of sex, status and geography. The man was a Levite, an honored status in society that set him above most males and above all females, who lived far back in the hill country of Ephraim. The woman lived in Bethlehem, far from Ephraim, and was not only a lowly woman with no status in society, but was taken as a concubine which gave her even less status.

The Levite took her home with him to Ephraim. It doesn't say but I imagine her father sold her to the Levite. Evidently her life was not very pleasant for she escaped and went to her father's house in Bethlehem. Notice how she doesn't even have the right to have it called "her house" or "her home," but "her father's house." The Levite followed her to persuade her to return. Evidently he had some feeling for her because the phrase translated "to persuade her" connotes kindness, even tenderness, in the Hebrew language. When he arrived at the house, the woman's father greeted him with a hearty greeting and invited him to stay for three days to rest up for the return trip.

On the morning of the fourth day, when they were preparing to leave, her father said, "Have something to eat first." The two men sat down to eat and drink. Of course, the woman wouldn't be eating with the men. They must have had a lot to drink because at some point the father said, "It's late now; you had better spend the night and leave in the morning." The next morning the father repeated the invitation, and the two men sat down to eat. Later in the day, the father again said, "Oh my, look how late it is. You might as well spend the night and leave tomorrow morning." But the Levite had had enough by this time and, taking his concubine, left. I wonder if the father after all did have some fatherly affection for his daughter and was trying to detain her as long as he could. Perhaps he was trying to talk the Levite into leaving his daughter behind. But the Levite and his concubine left.

They came to Jerusalem, only a short distance from Bethlehem, late in the day. The servant asked, "Why don't we spend the night here in Jerusalem?" At this time in history Jerusalem was not one of the Hebrew tribal cities, and as the Levite did not want to stay in a foreign city, they pressed on to Gibeah, which was a city of the tribe of Benjamin. Of course, they didn't ask the woman's opinion. They arrived in Gibeah and sat down in the city square to wait for someone to invite them for the night. This was before motels when travelers depended on the ancient custom of hospitality. But no one invited them home, and they were beginning to feel very unwelcome. Then an old man, going home after a hard day's work on his farm, asked them where they came from and where they were going. When he found out the Levite was from Ephraim, he exclaimed, "Why I also am from Ephraim but am now living here in Gibeah." So he invited them to spend the night at his home.

And now we see the strange rules of hospitality. To a people who were formerly nomads, living off the desert where food and water were scarce, hospitality was a social necessity. Providing food, water and protection to the stranger was a major obligation. But the rules of hospitality applied only to men.

HER BODY WAS BROKEN  
JUDGES 19:1-20:11  
FEBRUARY 22, 1987

Page 2

After they had eaten, a gang of hoods (probably drunk) surrounded the house, beat on the door, and shouted, "Bring out the man who came into your house, that we may know him." That is the wording of the Revised Standard Version. The Good News Version is much clearer, "Send out that man who came home with you! We want to have sex with him." This incident of intended homosexual rape is reminiscent of a similar incident involving Lot and his two daughters. The old man went to the door and implored the thugs, "No, please don't do such an evil, immoral thing! This man is my guest." The host had to protect his guest; that was the rule of hospitality. He had two negotiating points: the concubine and his own virgin daughter. Notice what he offered the mob, "I'll bring out the man's concubine and my own virgin daughter, and you can have them. Do whatever you want to with them. But don't do such an awful thing to this man!" Such were the rules of hospitality in those days, where women had no rights and no protection.

The mob refused to listen to the old man. They continued to shout and beat on the door, until the Levite--the man who had traveled all the way to Bethlehem to retrieve his possession--his concubine, the woman for whom he evidently had some feelings of tenderness--opened the door and pushed the concubine outside. The tactic worked. They left him alone but "they raped her and abused her all night long and didn't stop until morning." The next morning the Levite opened the door and found the concubine lying in front of the house with her hands outstretched, reaching for the door, reaching for help. He said, "Get up. It's time for us to go." But there was no answer.

He put her body across the donkey and went home. There he took his knife, cut her body into twelve pieces and sent a piece to each of the twelve tribes of Israel. The people were horrified. They said, "We have never heard of such a thing! Nothing like this has ever happened since the Israelites left Egypt! Something must be done!" They called a meeting. All the leaders of the twelve tribes were there, and they decided to take action against the tribe of Benjamin for this atrocity. But first they asked the Levite for his testimony. Let me read you his account of the incident (Judges 20:4-5) "My concubine and I went to Gibeah in the territory of Benjamin to spend the night. The men of Gibeah came to get me and surrounded the house at night. They intended to kill me; instead they raped my concubine, and she died." An interesting version! "They intended to kill me; instead they killed her." No mention of his sacrificing her life to save his own! He opened the door to the mob, to trouble; but instead of facing his problem and dealing with it courageously, he took the cowardly route and sacrificed a woman. Her body was broken.

The ancient method of sacrifice is still alive and well in our time. The details of the tragedy of the concubine's sacrifice may horrify our delicate ears, but sometimes it takes the sordid details of a sacrifice like the concubine's, or the sordid details of the sacrifice of Jesus on a rugged, blood-stained cross, to break through our defenses. Sacrificing people for the sake of a cause or protection or ego is still quite prevalent. Nations think nothing of sacrificing young men and now, women, for the sake of war. We have thought little of opening the door to the enemy, shoving out our young men and saying, "Do whatever you want with them." It was Malvina Reynolds who suggested in one of her songs that we should keep the young lads home and send the bankers and the diplomats to war! Let them sacrifice themselves!



HER BODY WAS BROKEN  
JUDGES 19:1-20:11  
FEBRUARY 22, 1987

Page 3

We think nothing of expecting people to work 70 to 80 hours per week to get the job done, for the sake of profit. We willingly sacrifice the health of people for the sake of profit. It used to be factory workers who were sacrificed, but they unionized to protect themselves. Now, here in Silicon Valley, technicians, programmers, professionals and executives are expected to work long, grueling hours; sacrificing self, marriage and family for the sake of "success."

As a society we are willing to sacrifice the environment for the sake of progress. We let toxic wastes poison our soil and water, pollution poison our air, and underground nuclear testing do who-knows-what damage. We are willing to sacrifice future generations--our children and grandchildren--for the sake of our comfort and wealth. Our generation is greedy! Some parents are only too willing to sacrifice their children for the sake of grades, college admission, the envy of neighbors, or their own dreams. They want their children to achieve what they could never achieve for themselves. They try to live vicariously through their children's achievements and accomplishments, rarely asking the child what he/she might like to do and be.

And, individually, we look for a victim, a scapegoat, on which to lay our problems. When we open the door and there is an evil mob lurking, stomping, shouting, we would desperately prefer to absolve ourselves of the responsibility of facing the situation. We would much prefer finding a victim to sacrifice, one to take the blame or suffer the consequences.

The Bible and our Christian faith insist that moral and ethical living begin with honesty and the accepting of responsibility for our lives. We call this "repentance." Jesus began his ministry, his preaching, with the call to "repent and believe." To repent means to look at your life in all honesty, take the responsibility for your decisions, and decide to act in accordance with what is right and just. The horror of the concubine's tragedy and the horror of the cross should shock all of us into realizing and admitting the evil we and all humankind are capable of doing. We must be shocked into repentance.

But the sacrifice of Jesus has a further meaning as well. The ancient sacrificial system does not have much meaning for us today. We do not feel the necessity of appeasing an angry god by sacrificing a lamb on the altar. When we sing and hear words about Jesus, the sacrificial lamb, it is difficult for us to understand them, because the context of the ancient sacrificial systems is no longer meaningful to us. But, to understand the sacrifice of Jesus in the context of the Levite's sacrificing of his concubine brings an entirely new meaning. The good news of the gospel is that we do not need to open the door and go out to face the mob in our own strength alone. God is with us. God is with us in the struggle. We do not have to face the mob all by ourselves because Jesus was sacrificed.

Jesus will help you face and deal with whatever evil lurks outside your door. You don't need to sacrifice anyone or anything else, because Jesus has already been sacrificed. Jesus has paid the price. Humankind opened the door, saw the shouting mob of evil and sin; humankind confronted the devil and shoved out Jesus as a sacrifice. Now when the mob shouts at your door, now when the problems get heavy, now when responsibility needs to be assumed, now

HER BODY WAS BROKEN

DOUGLAS NORRIS  
FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA

FEBRUARY 22, 1987

when a decision must be made, you do not need to look for a concubine to sacrifice so you can be absolved of responsibility and hide inside overnight. Now you can lay your burden, your worry, your anxiety, your fear on Jesus who was sacrificed. Now you can open the door to whatever is out there, and confidently face and conquer it in the power of the Holy Spirit, the risen Christ, the Christ who was not only sacrificed, but who was raised from the dead.

Salvation is a relationship with God where Jesus takes your problems upon himself in sacrifice, receives you into his forgiving, empowering grace and enables you to take responsibility for your life, fearing no one else, fearing nothing else. Jesus Christ went to the cross, took your sins and burdens on his shoulders, was sacrificed, his body was broken, died, and was raised from the dead in triumphant victory. The sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus enable you to repent, face your life in honesty, make your decisions responsibly, and act in the confidence of ultimate victory. Why? Because Jesus was sacrificed. He died for you.