

November 22, 2009 Temple Baptist Church, Jamestown, ND

TITLE: SPIRITUAL HEALTH REFORM, Judges 19-21 (*Life Stranger Than Fiction #9*)

The debate over health care reform is getting more intense. As the proposed bills become more complex, various sides are becoming more entrenched. Needs are trumpeted, but the issue of responsibility often seems to be sidestepped. **We are depending on a political solution to a genuine need that requires both compassion and common sense.** Tragically, it seems to me that both are being lost in the rhetoric.

Health care, though, is not just about our bodies. The book of Judges ends with one of the most bizarre, macabre and tragic stories in all scripture. **The events seem unbelievable, until we consider our own society.** A 15-year old girl leaves a school dance, joins a group drinking on school grounds and then is savagely gang raped, while no one calls for help. An army military officer, whose job is to help soldiers, goes on a shooting rampage at Fort Hood, Texas, yelling out in Arabic that Allah is great as he murders defenseless women and men. A man from Oklahoma hires an acquaintance to kill his son-in-law in Fargo. A lady in Grand Forks, whose home is across the street from an elementary school, is arraigned for showing pornographic movies from her front window, opening her windows and turning up the volume, and then assaulting police officers who try to deal with the situation. A 15-year old girl from Missouri murders a child, allegedly to see what it feels like to kill someone.

**Would anyone disagree that there is serious need for spiritual health reform?** Please fasten your seat belt as the text is not easy to read. How many of you read the passage? We learn that Phinehas, grandson of Aaron and known as a godly man, is the high priest at the time (cf. 20:28; Numbers 25:1-15; 31:6; Joshua 22:9-34), but he has little influence over the widely scattered tribes, even though the ark of the covenant temporarily moves from town to town in the central region of Israel. The time is shortly after the death of Joshua, earlier than most of the events of the book of Judges. Why is this story included and why at the end of the book? First, it is the account of how the tribe of Benjamin, once very strong (cf. Numbers 26:41), becomes so small. Second, it does not fit thematically into the main purpose of the book, which is to share accounts of leaders whom God uses to deliver his people. The last two accounts in chapters 17-21 illustrate the result of people who do not follow God and His ways. The story last week about Micah, the Levite and the Danites illustrates the idolatry of the day, while this account illustrates the anarchy and injustice.

It is important that we pay attention to the comments of the author, which bracket this account. *In those days Israel had no king.* Judges 19:1 *In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.* Judges 21:25 **No leadership and limited spiritual understanding mix a recipe for disaster.**

Read 19:1-20:16. The Benjamites, though vastly outnumbered, have a strategic advantage in defending Gibeah, which is on a hill. Forays by the Israelite army on successive days result in casualties to their forces of 21,000 and 18,000 soldiers. The Benjamites are relatively unscathed. The Israelite army, although seeking guidance from the LORD previously, now gather at Bethel to weep, fast, present burnt offerings as a sign of repentance and fellowship offerings out of desire for reconciliation (cf. Leviticus 1:4; 7:16).

Read 20:28b-36a. The Benjamite soldiers are drawn outside the city, overconfident that they are winning again. A 10,000-soldier ambush moves into the city, kills the people, sets the city on fire, serving as a signal for the Israelite army to turn on the Benjamites. The pincer move along with subsequent pursuit leaves the 26,000-man army with 600 survivors. Chapter 21 describes the grief of the Israelites that a tribe of Israel is nearly annihilated and that there are now no women for them to marry. They concoct a plan to deal with vows they made. The first vow was that all the tribes must gather, but the city of Jabesh Gilead (east of the river) decides it doesn't want to have a part in this civil war. The Israelite army wipes out the city and carries off 400 virgins to give as wives to the 600 Benjamites. Still 200 women short they devise another plan that the Benjamites be allowed to take another 200 teen girls during the fall festival at Shiloh. This way the Israelites won't break their vow of *giving* their daughters in marriage, but won't prevent the Benjamites from *taking* them.

One commentator says the story is about a verdict (The guilty should die.) and a vow (We will not give our daughters in marriage.). (See Warren Wiersbe, *Be Available*.) A few additional comments. Although a concubine is technically viewed as the wife of the husband and has limited legal rights, she has no inheritance rights. **God does not condone this practice and it is not His intent for marriage, but it is a reality in many places then and now.**

The Levite, like the one in the previous story, does not act like the man of God he is to be, neither in his taking the concubine nor in how he treats her. He goes to sleep, while she is being brutalized by the men of the village, simply calls for her to get up the next morning, desecrates her body by dividing it and sending portions to the various tribes and gets the desired result of action by the Israelite tribes. **He has a callous disregard for his wife and accepts no personal responsibility for his own actions.**

The rules of hospitality of that culture and the desperate situation of the elderly man push him to the extreme of offering the women to satisfy the mob. The people of Gibeah, instead of providing true hospitality, are set on vile sexual immorality that the Bible specifically condemns (cf. Genesis 19; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:24-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

Although there is a desire to deal with the sin, rash decisions and vows are made that exacerbate the situation. The Benjamites, rather than dealing with the evil (20:13) in their midst, defend these *wicked men* (literally, *sons of Belial*, cf. 19:22; 20:13; 1 Samuel 1:16; 2:12) for *this lewd and disgraceful act*. The word translated *disgraceful act* (19:23; 20:6, 10) is translated *utter foolishness* in other contexts and is related to the name Nabal.

Dr. Warren Wiersbe (*Be Available*) writes, *The 600 men got their brides, the eleven tribes kept their vow, the citizens of Gibeah were punished, the tribe of Benjamin was taught a lesson, and the twelve tribes of Israel were saved. The 600 men of Benjamin, with their brides, returned to their inheritance, cleaned up the debris, repaired the cities, and started life all over again.*

*But all this carnage and destruction happened because one Levite didn't have the courage to stand up for what was right and treat his wife honorably. Once again, as with Jonathan, Micah, and the Danites (Jdg. 17-18), the problem started in the home. As goes the home, so goes the nation.*

If you are **troubled by what we read**, it's a good sign, because your **heart is still soft to the Holy Spirit** and **available for God's work**. But there are some hard personal questions each of us must ask, because as I said earlier, these events really aren't all that different from things we hear and read about today.

◆ Is there anything in my house that I must remove?

We are shocked by the casual way that the Levite treats his wife, how the Gibeonites have passion for homosexual sin but not for hospitality, and how the Benjamites have more concern for their pride than for their purity.

What do we bring into our homes via magazines, music and movies; the television, computer and romance novels; cell phones, video games and our speech? There is no question that **exposing ourselves, our children, our families and friends to violence, graphic sexuality and perversion not only heightens our desire for those things, but dulls our response to those who are victims of such lewdness, evil and disgraceful foolishness.**

The Bible says, *I will walk in my house with blameless heart. I will set before my eyes no vile thing. The deeds of faithless men I hate; they will not cling to me. Men of perverse heart shall be far from me; I will have nothing to do with evil.*  
Psalm 101:2-4 Read Psalm 101 today.

Do you hate the vile thing so much that you are willing to remove it? What steps will you take? When? Will you ask God to reveal those and other things?

One of my favorite verses is, *Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.* Proverbs 4:23

- ◆ Is there any sin in my life I must confess?

In our story there is sexual unfaithfulness, sexual perversion of gang rape and homosexuality, murder, refusing to take responsibility for one's own actions, inciting others without sharing all the facts, pride, the making of rash decisions and vows, harsh judgment, regarding traditions as more important than people, a following of one's own ways rather than God's ways.

**We must first confess our sin to God.** Even David understood this when he sinned with Bathsheba and had her husband killed in the attempted cover up. Although we wrong others and must take responsibility for that, showing remorse, admitting how we've wronged that person, asking for forgiveness and making appropriate restitution, it is **ultimately against God that we sin.** *Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. . . Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.* Psalm 51:5, 10

James writes that **admitting our sins to trusted brothers and sisters in Christ helps break the hold of secrecy and allows us to live in the freedom of the forgiveness God desires for us.** *Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.* James 5:16 (cf. 1 John 1:9)

Is there any sin in your life you must confess to God? When? Who will you ask to help hold you accountable?

- ◆ Is there any direction from God I must obey?

Is God putting something on your heart to be or do that you know is from Him? It is not your own idea (doing what you see fit), but it is in keeping with the teaching of God's Word.

Another comment from Dr. Wiersbe (*Be Available*). *When Israel adopted the lifestyle of the pagan nations around them, they weakened their own nation. When Israel turned to idols, God turned from blessing them. Nations don't decay and collapse because of the people who peddle pornography and narcotics, but because of Christians who are no longer salt and light. God expects sinners to be sinners, though He disapproves of what they do, but He doesn't expect **saints** to act like sinners. Compromising Christians not only hurt themselves and their families and their churches, but also contribute to the decay of the whole nation.*

The Bible says, *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly,*

*unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. James 3:13-18*

Conclusion. Spiritual health reform begins in my life and your life individually. Let's learn from God's judgment and His grace as He does His work in our lives. Please read the passage if you haven't done so and consider the questions in your listening guide. Pray.