

# A Hero Will Rise

The Book of Judges

Text

Judges 19:1-30

Topic

To save himself, a Levite delivers his concubine to a mob to be sexually assaulted, then dismembers her body and sends one piece to each of the twelve tribes of Israel

Title

*“An Affair to Dismember”*

As a kid I was strangely fascinated by the Good Sam Club logo on the bumpers of RV's. If you're not familiar with the logo, it's the cartoon head of a weirdly smiling man, topped by a halo.

It's doubtful you haven't heard of it, but just in case, it's an association of RV owners, “focused on making RVing safer and more enjoyable, and on saving members money through club-endorsed benefits and services.”

Being the biblically deprived child that I was, I thought “Sam” was the name of the guy who started the club. I'm not sure when I realized that “Sam” was short for Samaritan, and that the club's name comes from the Bible parable of the Good Samaritan, which tells of a traveling Samaritan who risked his own life and livelihood to help a Jew along the road who had been robbed and beaten.

The parable was told following a Q&A Jesus had with a Jewish theologian, called a “lawyer.” Jesus had asked him to summarize what the Bible says a person must do to inherit eternal life. He answered, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND,' and 'YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF'” (Luke 10:27).

When the lawyer asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?,” the Lord told the Parable of the Good Samaritan. It was revolutionary in many ways, not the least of which in that Jews despised Samaritans, and would certainly not stop to help one.

When the Samaritan stopped to help, it wasn’t because the Jew was his neighbor. It was because the Samaritan was acting as neighbor to the Jew.

The parable establishes that it isn't so much a matter of who is my neighbor as it is my being a “neighbor” to everyone, thereby showing my invisible love for God through my visible love for them.

During the time of the Judges, there weren’t lawyers, but there were Levites. One of their duties was the teaching of the Law.

Among all the Jews, a well-versed Levite ought to be the one most likely to act like the Good Samaritan.

If there was a Bad Samaritan’s Club, the Levite in our chapter was its founder. When it comes time to act by loving his “neighbor” as himself, he commits an epic fail, choosing self-preservation.

Since loving God with all that we've got and with all that we are, and being neighbors who show God's love to everyone, is still in force, we can go through this chapter asking the following two questions: #1 Are You Merely Going Through The Motions Of Loving Your Neighbor As Yourself?, and #2 Are You Willing To Go To The Extremes Of Loving Your Neighbor As Yourself?

## #1 Are You Merely Going Through The Motions Of Loving Your Neighbor As Yourself?

(v1-21)

I like to check the Parental Guidelines that are posted for movies before watching them. They have a few categories, then rate the film in each, providing a brief summary.

I feel compelled to provide my Pastoral Guidelines for the story we are about to read:

- Alcohol, Drugs & Smoking - **Moderate**. Two men spend the better part of four days feasting, involving wine that gives them a buzz.
- Violence & Gore - **Extreme**. A woman's body is dismembered into twelve pieces, which are then sent to each of the twelve tribes of Israel.
- Frightening & Intense Scenes - **Extreme**. A group of perverted men threaten violence against the occupants of a house.
- Sex & Nudity - **Off-the-chart Extreme**. A woman is gang-raped all night, then left for dead.

This story is a movie you wouldn't watch. We'll get the most out of it as we focus on the Levite we meet in verse one.

Jdg 19:1 And it came to pass in those days, when *there was* no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite staying in the remote mountains of Ephraim. He took for himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah.

This story took place prior to the raising up of the Judges, pretty soon after the death of Joshua. There was no human king, and the tribes were not submitting to the rule of God as their king.

A "concubine" was a woman with less status than a wife, who was typically brought into the household because the wife could not bear children. In this story the concubine's status is unclear:

1. First of all, there is no mention of a wife in addition to her.
2. Second of all, although she is called a "concubine," the Levite is mentioned as her "husband."
3. Third of all, the Levite is mentioned as the "son-in-law" of the woman's father, and he as the "father-in-law."

Whatever their relationship, there was serious marital discord:

Jdg 19:2 But his concubine played the harlot against him, and went away from him to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah, and was there four whole months.

Before you judge her, you need to know that there are different ways of understanding the words translated "played the harlot." It *can* mean that she committed sexual sin.

But certain Greek translations say it means she became “angry” with him, resulting in her fleeing to her father’s house. She therefore may have left after a domestic dispute in which the Levite was also to blame.

Jdg 19:3 Then her husband arose and went after her, to speak kindly to her *and* bring her back, having his servant and a couple of donkeys with him. So she brought him into her father's house; and when the father of the young woman saw him, he was glad to meet him.

The concubine “brought him into” the house. They resolved their differences. This may have been a typical occurrence between them. It sort of reads like an abuse cycle repeating itself.

The dad was “glad to meet him,” but that can mean he gladly welcomed him - **not** that it was the first time they’d met.

Jdg 19:4 Now his father-in-law, the young woman's father, detained him; and he stayed with him three days. So they ate and drank and lodged there.

Jdg 19:5 Then it came to pass on the fourth day that they arose early in the morning, and he stood to depart; but the young woman's father said to his son-in-law, "Refresh your heart with a morsel of bread, and afterward go your way."

Jdg 19:6 So they sat down, and the two of them ate and drank together. Then the young woman's father said to the man, "Please be content to stay all night, and let your heart be merry."

Jdg 19:7 And when the man stood to depart, his father-in-law urged him; so he lodged there again.

This was an episode of *Hospitality Gone Wild*. We can assume they were at least getting buzzed, if not drunk, by the use of the words, "let your heart be merry."

Jdg 19:8 Then he arose early in the morning on the fifth day to depart, but the young woman's father said, "Please refresh your heart." So they delayed until afternoon; and both of them ate.

Jdg 19:9 And when the man stood to depart - he and his concubine and his servant - his father-in-law, the young woman's father, said to him, "Look, the day is now drawing toward evening; please spend the night. See, the day is coming to an end; lodge here, that your heart may be merry. Tomorrow go your way early, so that you may get home."

Jdg 19:10 However, the man was not willing to spend that night; so he rose and departed, and came opposite Jebus (that *is*, Jerusalem). With him were the two saddled donkeys; his concubine *was* also with him.

Late-afternoon travel that could leave you out at dark was just never a good idea. There were too many dangers, and it limited your options. Travel like that, and you were gonna need a Good Samaritan.

Jdg 19:11 They *were* near Jebus, and the day was far spent; and the servant said to his master, "Come, please, and let us turn aside into this city of the Jebusites and lodge in it."

Jdg 19:12 But his master said to him, "We will not turn aside here into a city of foreigners, who *are* not of the children of Israel; we will go on to Gibeah."

Jdg 19:13 So he said to his servant, "Come, let us draw near to one of these places, and spend the night in Gibeah or in Ramah."

Jdg 19:14 And they passed by and went their way; and the sun went down on them near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin.

Ramah was out; too dark to get there safely. Gibeah was now their only choice.

Jdg 19:15 They turned aside there to go in to lodge in Gibeah. And when he went in, he sat down in the open square of the city, for no one would take them into *his* house to spend the night.

Everyone's home was a hotel. If a stranger came, it was a big deal. In that culture, hospitality was normally of supreme importance. It was unheard of that no one would take them in.

Jdg 19:16 Just then an old man came in from his work in the field at evening, who also *was* from the mountains of Ephraim; he was staying in Gibeah, whereas the men of the place *were* Benjamites.

Jdg 19:17 And when he raised his eyes, he saw the traveler in the open square of the city; and the old man said, "Where are you going, and where do you come from?"

Jdg 19:18 So he said to him, "*We are* passing from Bethlehem in Judah toward the remote mountains of Ephraim; I *am* from there. I went to Bethlehem in Judah; *now* I am going to the house of the LORD. But there *is* no one who will take me into his house,

Jdg 19:19 although we have both straw and fodder for our donkeys, and bread and wine for myself, for your female servant, and for the young man *who is* with your servant; *there is* no lack of anything."

Jdg 19:20 And the old man said, "Peace *be* with you! However, *let* all your needs *be* my responsibility; only do not spend the night in the open square."

Jdg 19:21 So he brought him into his house, and gave fodder to the donkeys. And they washed their feet, and ate and drank.

It isn't exactly the Parable of the Good Samaritan, but this old man certainly showed the Levite hospitality. He did it willingly, and at some cost to himself. Kudos to him.

On the other hand, this was fairly easy, and this was expected. This was minimal. The fact that others refused to show hospitality makes the old man stand-out. But he was only doing what was required and customary.

The old man was merely going through the motions. I can say that because in a moment we'll see that he was not really one to risk his own life for the sake of another.

The story thus far gives us an opportunity to gauge our own Good Samaritan-ing (if I can coin a word). We can start by looking at our behavior in the church. The Bible tells us, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10).

"Doing good" is a broad command. It involves things like regularly supporting the church, financially and through serving.

It involves regular support for missions and missionaries.

Then there are special needs - like relief for the hurricane victims that we are making you aware of; or Operation Christmas Child.

Then there are individual needs that God lays on your heart as you fulfill the role of Good Samaritan to someone in need that you encounter.

Christians are one big Good Sam Club, for sure doing the minimum, but then going beyond as the Lord leads.



## #2 Are You Willing To Go To The Extremes Of Loving Your Neighbor As Yourself?

(v22-30)

I came across this rather expressive quote regarding loving others: “It seems to demand that I tear the skin off my body and wrap it around another person so that I feel that I am that other person; and all the longings that I have for my own safety and health and success and happiness I now feel for that other person as though he [or she] were me.”

It’s a pretty high standard, but certainly the one lived-out by the Good Samaritan.

It was supremely lived out by Jesus, Who quite literally took upon Himself a body like ours, adding humanity to His deity, in order to take our place on the Cross.

It’s not my purpose to deride us for failing to meet this high standard; and I’d be the first in failure anyway.

It is good, however, to be reminded that the Christian who loves like Jesus is out on the edge of a dangerous battlefield, where supernatural forces are seeking to destroy human lives. It’s a risky thing to love others as yourself.

It is good to be challenged... And that’s what this story does.

Jdg 19:22 As they were enjoying themselves, suddenly certain men of the city, perverted men, surrounded the house *and* beat on the door. They spoke to the master of the house, the old man, saying, "Bring out the man who came to your house, that we may know him *carnally!*"

All of a sudden this tale of hospitality sounds like we are in a futuristic dystopian world in which roving gangs rob and rape. It's *Mad Max Gibeah*.

Remember that this was happening closer to the death of Joshua, not well after it. It reveals just how quickly a society can deteriorate.

If this all sounds familiar, that's because something very similar happened in Sodom during the time of Abraham. The difference is that Sodom was a city of nonbelievers, whereas Gibeah was Israeli.

It's simply awful when God's people are no better than nonbelievers.

Jdg 19:23 But the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my brethren! I beg you, do not act so wickedly! Seeing this man has come into my house, do not commit this outrage.

Kudos for the old man. It must have been frightening to step outside and face the gang.

He appealed to their sense of community, reminding them that a stranger lodged in a house had the expectation of safety. And he appealed to their sense of basic humanity, calling their desire an “outrage.”

But what he says next is *not* the thinking of a Good Samaritan:

Jdg 19:24 Look, *here is* my virgin daughter and *the man's* concubine; let me bring them out now. Humble them, and do with them as you please; but to this man do not do such a vile thing!"

Let that sink in.

The old man revealed the value he placed on lives. He valued his own life above all. He was not willing to risk it defending his guest; instead, he offered the lesser-lives of his own daughter, and the concubine.

And he seemed a little concerned about his reputation as a person of hospitality. He didn't want anything to happen to his guest.

It's important we understand that the original Good Samaritan in Jesus' parable risked his life to help the needy Jewish traveler.

Think of those who hid and harbored Jews during WW2, such as Corrie Ten Boom (whose story is told in *The Hiding Place*). It was a serious situation.

Jdg 19:25 But the men would not heed him. So the man took his concubine and brought *her* out to them. And they knew her and abused her all night until morning; and when the day began to break, they let her go.

The Levite had brought all this upon the old man's house. Taking matters into his own hands, he thrust his concubine out the door.

This story started as a domestic dispute with a happy, festive reconciliation. But apparently that was only on the surface. It's clear the Levite had no real love for his concubine. She was, to him, an object to be used as he saw fit.

If you are to love your neighbor - a stranger - more than yourself, how much more ought you to love your wife?

We must further conclude that the Levite had no real love for God. Loving your neighbor as yourself is the visible evidence of your invisible love for God.

Self-preservation at the cost of another's life is just not love. Consider Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. He desired to avoid the Cross; who wouldn't? But we cannot fathom Him acting to preserve Himself at the expense of even one human life.

I'm saying that the old man and the Levite should have risked their own lives.

It reminds me of those riddles, usually about lifeboats cast off a sinking ship, where there isn't enough room to save everybody. You're told a little about the possible survivors and asked to make a choice.

Three people are in a lifeboat, adrift at sea. They have four cigarettes, but no matches or lighters. How can they each smoke a cigarette?

*They throw one cigarette overboard making the the lifeboat a cigarette lighter.*

The normal lifeboat dilemmas always include folks who seem undeserving. There are no right answers; its designed to see how we value different human life.

If you are a believer, the solution is to give your spot to any nonbeliever.

This story is not about human-trafficking... But I want to mention it in the context of the concubine's inhumane treatment.

Trafficking women and children for sexual exploitation is the fastest growing criminal enterprise in the world. This, despite the fact international law and the laws of 134 countries criminalize sex trafficking.

- At least 20.9 million adults and children are bought and sold worldwide into commercial sexual servitude, forced labor and bonded labor.
- About 2 million children are exploited every year in the global commercial sex trade.
- Almost 6 in 10 identified trafficking survivors were trafficked for sexual exploitation.
- Women and girls make up 98% of victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

It's a problem right here in the US. The Justice Department estimates that 14,500 - 17,500 people are trafficked into the country every year. The 2016 Global Slavery Index estimates that including US citizens and immigrants 57,700 people are victims of human trafficking.

Those being trafficked include young children, teenagers, men and women, and can be domestic citizens or foreign nationals. According to the Department of State's statistics from 2000, there are approximately 244,000 American children and youth that are at risk for sex trafficking each year.

There are a number of Christian organizations you can support that are working to end human trafficking.

Jdg 19:26 Then the woman came as the day was dawning, and fell down at the door of the man's house where her master *was*, till it was light.

You know what this tells us? **It tells us that the Levite went to bed.** He slept while his concubine was being sexually assaulted. He did nothing to come to her aid.

Jdg 19:27 When her master arose in the morning, and opened the doors of the house and went out to go his way, there was his concubine, fallen *at* the door of the house with her hands on the threshold.

He didn't, first thing, go out to search for her. You get the impression he had his coffee, a little breakfast, and read the news.

He had already abandoned her in his own mind.

Notice, too, he is now referred to as her "master," not her husband.

Jdg 19:28 And he said to her, "Get up and let us be going." But there was no answer. So the man lifted her onto the donkey; and the man got up and went to his place.

It's not clear whether she was dead or merely unconscious. His words are haunting: "Get up and let us be going."

If you have been the victim of a sexual assault, all of this may be dredging-up emotions. We want to represent Jesus to you, in His compassion and healing. We don't always know how to do that without making you feel worse... **But know that you are loved.**

Could things get any worse? In the time of the Judges, yes.

Jdg 19:29 When he entered his house he took a knife, laid hold of his concubine, and divided her into twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel.

Once again, it is unclear if she was dead or merely unconscious. No mourning for her; no funeral; no burial. Her body was nothing more than an object to be used as the Levite saw fit.

Why send a piece of her to each of the twelve tribes? Personal revenge.

Jdg 19:30 And so it was that all who saw it said, "No such deed has been done or seen from the day that the children of Israel came up from the land of Egypt until this day. Consider it, confer, and speak up!"

We'll see in chapter twenty that the Levite precipitated a civil war that got a ton of people killed. It was all for his own self-promotion and self-esteem.

As one charged with teaching God's Law, the Levite knew it was summarized in loving the Lord, and thereby loving your neighbor as yourself. However, the Levite was unwilling to take neighbor-love to its logical, spiritual extreme.

He quite obviously loved himself more than God and, therefore, had no real love for others.

If you are a first responder... Or military... You've committed to Good Samaritan-ing. You regularly are risking your lives for strangers.

You are our heroes.

Most of us will never face a life-and-death Samaritan choice. I'm thankful for that.

But our invisible love for God should nevertheless find expression in visible, practical and sacrificial love for others.

All of us can up our game, as it were, by getting more-and-more involved helping others - first, in the household of faith (the church), but then out in the world as well.

Ask the Lord, "Whose neighbor am I?," then act on it.