



"Right in His Own Eyes" Judges 19-21

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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in Menomonie Wisconsin
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No amount of warnings is ever enough. Neither is any amount of scare tactics. On Saturday, as Americans were celebrating Independence Day, 22-year-old Devon Staples was in the backyard of a friend's home in Calais, Maine. Staples decided to place a fireworks mortar tube on his head. He then set it off. He was killed instantly.

"I was the first one who got there. There was no rushing him to the hospital. There was no Devon left when I got there," Cody, 25, said. "It was a freak accident ..."

No...it wasn't.

We would like to be able to say it was, but really...we you try...when you *move*, to launch fireworks off the top of your head, that's not really an accident. Devon Staples was not killed by an accident. He was killed by stupidity. By arrogance. By somehow in his pride believing that he couldn't be touched.

I do believe it's the "stupid time" of the year here in America. I wish that we in the spiritual community were different...that we were adverse to such behavior, but the fact is so often we are not. In the world, we expect such behavior. But should we expect different in the faith world? Or do we just *hope* for a different outcome?

In your hands is a message I delivered right about this same time last year. ("*Kibroth Hattaavah; The Graves of Craving*" July 27th, 2014) I read it and found it incredibly ironic. For I was tempted to just give the same message again. Here it is July a year later exactly, and the tone around JFB is the seemingly the same as it was exactly one year ago and compelled me to give that message in the first place. Now, I cannot...nor would I presume to speak for everyone here. Some of you are on a consistent forward trajectory spiritually speaking, yet many of us frankly are going around and around on the merry-go-round of life and when we do finally get tired and get off, we will fly off in a self-destructive crash, most often taking the feet out from under a few others who happen to be standing along side.

What is the answer?

On April 3rd, 1977 in a small place called Tenerife in the Canary Islands, two 747's collided on the runway leaving 575 people dead. Exactly what happened is not clear, ...seldom in such cases is it all clear, ...but some things we know. It was a foggy day and the two pilots could not see each other. So right away we have conditions that have set up the events that would follow. Then...for some reason for which we will never know, the Dutch pilot began his takeoff without clearance from the control tower. Even though he no doubt thought he was in the right...that he was doing the right thing, the results say a different story...the end speaks of the truth no matter what the pilot thought.

Ironically, the pilot violated one of the most overtly taught and repeatedly emphasized issues in his training. And that is when you are in such situations...especially when the way ahead is foggy, you never ever do what is best in your own eyes. You always do what the control tower says to do. Why? What makes THAT guy so smart? Well, he sees things that you do not see, and knows things you do not know. He has better information and a greater clarity and perspective to bring the plane through safely. To act on our own brings disasters. And not just for the singular

pilot...but for everyone "on board or in your way." Friends, family, even bystanders that look to you as an example of the humility of Jesus Christ.

Today we live in a foggy time. In fact it gets worse seemingly daily! The inhabitants here are "flying blind." People are groping around trying to find something to help them navigate the abyss, and all the old landmarks aren't there any more and one does not know who to trust. Society, culture, morality, church and faith...it's all so fluid, and it is so very difficult to be get on solid ground and even harder to *feel* like you are on solid ground even if you are! It is very easy in such times to "fly by the seat of our pants." To trust yourself and "go with your instincts" and "feel" your way down the road ahead. This passage is a vivid example of what can happen when we do so.

I know it is easy at this point to look at the story and say "well, *no way*...I would have never let all that happen!" But you see, that is 20/20 hindsight! You know the end of the movie and can dodge the bullet. These people never intended things to go this way. They never expected things to go bad. They never expected to be killed by that fireworks.

Our only other alternative is to be guided by something and someone that can see what you cannot...one who has an advantage point above the fog...above the fray. Someone who knows what you do not. The promise of Scripture is that if we are willing *...and that can be so very hard for us*, to put our trust in the controller's hands...even when we cannot see, ...if we are willing to follow completely through on the directions...cutting no corners or cheating on any of the steps, God promises that He will guide us through the fog to safety.

The last three chapters of Judges has been called the "sewer" of scripture. It has in it some of the most disgusting and degrading events in the bible. There is no hero to save the day. There is no redemption for the participants. Just resignation to the inevitable. Just surrender to "what they had to do." These chapters read like a page out of the local newspaper...a video segment on the nightly national news. One where the anchorman says "we want to warn you, the following images are graphic and can be disturbing." But perhaps we...as I suspect the players in that day had, have become calloused ...a little numb...and maybe a whole lot uncaring. We have succumbed to self survival. To isolationism on a personal basis. We fought the tendency for a long long time...but eventually, as always is the case, left unresolved, the infection sooner or later kills us.

We keep telling ourselves that we can operate out here on our own...we can do what we want....we don't need anyone else...we don't need church or community or brothers and sisters to speak in to our life. We know what is happening. We know what we are doing. And we simply taxi for takeoff, and we don't care what anyone else thinks. We think we can chase the world and still have Jesus, even though the guy in the control tower has said from Genesis to Revelation that you can't. We think we can operate by our own rules and get off the ground ok. But then people die and you are left holding nothing but the dubious title of "the fool."

The Holy Spirit so dictated what would be recorded herein. This was not left here for 'shock and awe.' It was given for us to know the truth! But it is still ours to receive or reject. The fields of life are littered with the bodies of those who miscalculated...strewn with the bones of those who thought they needed no one else and that they could have their cake and eat it too.

Some of you have been fighting the same battles...having the same arguments...struggling with the same issues for a very long time. Often it is not because you have been unable to effectively rectify such, but in truth it is because you still really want that sin...that flesh...that worldly pursuit, so you inflame the issue instead of finishing it off.

You are still looking for a way: a way to have Jesus *and* that thing. Such will eventually take you away from us...because you *do* not and *cannot* get the support you want from here, and then eventually out of viable Christianity...even while you go to that other church that not only supports your pursuits but enables and encourages it because they want a body in the pew more than they want the righteous hand of Jesus upon them.

The last 5 chapters of Judges are held together by one theme...it appears in 17:6 and in 21:25..."*In those days there was no king in Israel: Every man did what was right in his own eyes.*" Chapters 17 and 18...a story of spiritual anarchy and 19-21...a story of moral anarchy. All smoothed over...all made right, because it was "*right in their own eyes.*"

We know we cannot place anything before God, and yet we chase career, worldly position and money over living our lives for the glory of God and His kingdom. And yet we push on...because it is "right in our own eyes." We simply don't love God that much. (Note 2 Timothy 3:1-9) Today we not only indulge in all the world has to offer, we defend our actions...saying we are "free" and we "have rights" and "I can do what I want." Indeed. But when God goes, everything and anything goes.

And let us not hear this message tonight as speaking of *them out there*, when the fact is, we have enough issues with this slide in *us in here!* The amount of energy and time and dancing that is given in order to play compromise and "straddle the middle" is astonishing to me. It's not discouraging to me that we come up short in these areas, it is devastating to me that we seek to white wash it and not only cover it up but further, *sanctify it in the sight of God and your brothers and sisters!*

These two guys...the farmer who opened his home to them to spend the night, and this fella with the concubine, were willing to sacrifice his virgin daughter and the guys concubine/wife in order to protect themselves. One thing I have found repeatedly in this life, is that when 'push comes to shove', there will be few people standing with you in defense of you. It seems to inevitably come to "every man for himself!" Let us be careful again not to wash our hands of this! We can reel back on this saying we would never do such a thing! But I have watched husbands sacrifice their wives...their families, in order to get what they want. In order to save face. In order to pursue a job or not hold a job. In order to look good to others. In order to please themselves. Oh, they threw them out 'that door' well enough! It was just so cloaked in denial and the shrug of innocence. These men gang raped that woman to death. And the look in the eyes of some of these family members often look like they have been thrown to the mob also...

And what came next is the height of arrogance and the pinnacle of selfish pride. It is the *embodiment* of blind hubris! The man...strangely insulted and audacious concerning the events that had transpired, set out to make a point...to "teach the people a lesson." So he cuts this girl up in 12 pieces and sends her body...piece by piece, to each of the 12 tribes of Israel. In effect, judging and ultimately condemning *them* for what had occurred!

Can you believe it? He placed the blame on everyone else, and not only claimed innocent, but actually took the high moral ground of righteousness. Personally, I don't know how many more times I can watch this take place and still remain a pastor. This isn't a slip up. It isn't a stumble. It is a wholesale spiritual and moral bloodbath and it all was played out ultimately at the hands of one man. A man that wants to claim innocence!

On March 16, 1968 there occurred what was later called "the most shocking episode of the Vietnam War. The **Mỹ Lai Massacre** was the Vietnam War mass killing of between 347 and 504 unarmed civilians in South Vietnam. It was committed by U.S. Army soldiers from the Company C of the 1st Battalion Infantry Division. Victims included men, women, children, and infants. Some of the women were gang-raped and their bodies mutilated. Twenty-six soldiers were charged with criminal offenses, but only Lieutenant William Calley Jr., a platoon leader in C Company, was convicted. Found guilty of killing 22 villagers, he was originally given a life sentence, but served only three and a half years under house arrest, eventually pardoned by President Nixon.

The news reports said that Lieutenant Calley sat in his jail cell after he was arrested, shaking his head saying "It couldn't be wrong, or I'd feel remorse about it."

"Everyone did what was right in his own eyes..."

Israel stepped up to the plate now. They were going to make things right! They were going to violently force capitulation or die trying. And the fact is, many of them did indeed die trying! No checking with God...no humility. Just the law of the jungle. It was nothing more than a riot, and nothing more righteous than many of the violent protests we have seen over the last year on TV, where our noble vindication came through smashing in store windows and looting and burning the town we live in. Again, cutting off our nose to spite our face...

So Israel starts making vows and raising an army. Forget about checking with God...we know what we are doing right? We don't need the permission from the control tower! We don't need advice from anyone else! But after **40,000 people were dead**, they finally decided to go to God and ask what ought to be done.

Then in chapter 21, there is this wave of remorse and dawning of reality; "*Oh God...what have we done?*" Do you know how often I have heard that in one form or another roll off the lips of a man or woman who was unstoppable as they burnt the village to their ground and sacrificed family, credibility, reputation, financial stability, their friends..their brothers and sisters, the street rep of Jesus Christ Himself? They never started out for things to go this far...they just wanted what they wanted! But how many...*just like these folks in chapter 21*, refused to back up and repent and humble themselves, but instead plowed forward with their own plan to "fix" the situation...to 'band aid' a 'hemorrhaging spiritual wound'...give the patient some Advil when they need triage.

The tribes of Israel lit upon a great idea. Let's go kill everyone up in this remote county and steal all their women. Ya...that's a good idea! That's a good remedy for death...just kill some more people! Just fix the pain you have caused by causing some more pain. Not to yourself of course, but rather to everyone else around you.

Let's face it. This is one ugly story! I wish it was the last time I would see such a thing, but for 20 years of ministry I have watched this play out over and over with only subtle nuances of differences and the names that have been changed. Because your sin does not affect you alone. It affects everyone around you whether you believe that or see that.

So, what happened? What caused all of this? Where did it all begin? Notice Judges 20:27-28: it would be easy to miss the significance of this passage. It says the Ark of God was in Bethel in those days. Yet for hundreds of years the Ark resided where God had told them to put it...in the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle of Shiloh. But along the way men decided that they *wanted* God, and they *wanted* His blessings, His power, and His care, but all of it only on ***their terms***. So they did church, did God, and did religion in the way they wanted to do it! They reinvented the living of faith to fit their pursuits and desires. They rejected God's explicit instructions and opted for their own plan and their own wants. They lost the understanding of the holiness of God. And then came sexual sin..then came violence and hardness, and then came apostasy, and then everything fell apart.

It didn't happen in a day, and it didn't happen in a week. It came from slow refusal of God, subtle rejection of His direct will, and a creeping acceptance of replacing God with the things of this world. So I end this section and this book with the words of Paul the apostle: "*Now these things happened as examples for us...that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved...nor let us act immorally...nor let us try the Lord...nor grumble...and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come...*(1 Corinthians 10:6-11)