

****Trigger Warning ---this may be traumatic for some readers****

But There Was No Answer

Judges 19:1-28

The Levite's Concubine

In those days, when there was no king in Israel, a certain Levite, residing in the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, took to himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. But his concubine became angry with him, and she went away from him to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah and was there some four months. Then her husband set out after her, to speak tenderly to her and bring her back. He had with him his servant and a couple of donkeys. When he reached her father's house, the girl's father saw him and came with joy to meet him. His father-in-law, the girl's father, made him stay, and he remained with him three days; so they ate and drank, and he stayed there.

When he left, he had with him a couple of saddled donkeys, and his concubine was with him. When they were near Jebus, the day was far spent, and the servant said to his master, "Come now, let us turn aside to this city of the Jebusites, and spend the night in it." But his master said to him, "We will not turn aside into a city of foreigners, who do not belong to the people of Israel; but we will continue on to Gibeah." Then he said to his servant, "Come, let us try to reach one of these places, and spend the night at Gibeah or at Ramah." So they passed on and went their way; and the sun went down on them near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin. They turned aside there, to go in and spend the night at Gibeah. He went in and sat down in the open square of the city, but no one took them in to spend the night.

Then at evening there was an old man coming from his work in the field. The man was from the hill country of Ephraim, and he was residing in Gibeah. (The people of the place were Benjaminites.) When the old man looked up and saw the wayfarer in the open square of the city, he said, "Where are you going and where do you come from?" He answered him, "We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah to the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, from which I come. I went to Bethlehem in Judah; and I am going to my home. Nobody has offered to take me in. We your servants have straw and fodder for our donkeys, with bread and wine for me and the woman and the young man along with us. We need nothing more." The old man said, "Peace be to you. I will care for all your wants; only do not spend the night in the square." So he brought him into his house, and fed the donkeys; they washed their feet, and ate and drank.

Gibeah's Crime

While they were enjoying themselves, the men of the city, a perverse lot, surrounded the house, and started pounding on the door. They said to the old man, the master of the house, "Bring out the man who came into your house, so that we may have intercourse with him." And the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Since this man is my guest, do not do this vile thing. Here are my virgin daughter and his concubine; let me bring them out now. Ravish them and do whatever you want to them; but against this man do not do such a vile thing." But the men would not listen to him. So, the man

seized his concubine, and put her out to them. They wantonly raped her and abused her all through the night until the morning. And as the dawn began to break, they let her go. As morning appeared, the woman came and fell down at the door of the man's house where her master was, until it was light.

In the morning her master got up, opened the doors of the house, and when he went out to go on his way, there was his concubine lying at the door of the house, with her hands on the threshold. "Get up," he said to her, "we are going." But there was no answer. Then he put her on the donkey; and the man set out for his home.

The cultural context of this story is based in a bride price marriage system that often results in exploitation of women and girls. As a concubine, it is likely that she was considered a wife of lower status because she did not receive a bride price. She was expected to give her husband sexual pleasure and to produce heirs. Given the social subordination and mistreatment of women within the culture, her life did not have as great a value as that of men. And within that patriarchal culture, many women showed up in biblical stories unnamed and silenced. At the beginning of this story, we read that the concubine left her husband, the Levite, and returned to her father's house, because she was angry with him. Her action was an attempt at reclaiming her own agency, but it was fatally short-lived after being retrieved by her husband, the Levite.

It was on the journey back to the Levite's home that tragedy struck. When confronted by a "perverse lot" of men, the concubine's husband forcibly gave her to them, in a selfish act to protect himself from sexual assault. The group of men brutally gang-raped her through the night and left her for dead. In the morning, the Levite put her lifeless body on a donkey and rode home.

So many people in this story were complicit in gender-based violence, beginning with the Levite himself who offered his wife to be sacrificed to spare his own life. The owner of the home even offered up his own daughters to please the perverse lot of men. The exploitation of women and girls to protect men's honor and dignity was on full display and, unfortunately, this is still a reality, globally.

It is estimated that 1 out of 3 women are victims of sexual violence. The World Bank has reported staggering numbers about violence against women and girls worldwide:

35% of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence, globally, 7% of women have been sexually assaulted by someone other than a partner, globally, as many as 38% of murders of women are committed by an intimate partner.

The story of the Levite's concubine, combined with the data of the horrendous things still happening to women across the world, is a shocking reminder that violence against women is an ongoing global pandemic.

Gender based violence affects women and girls of all socio-economic backgrounds. Although she tried to defend herself by running back to her father's home, without having access to basic human rights and privileges in her culture, the concubine was left without the necessary protection from exploitation and harm. Victims of rape and gender-based violence need our compassion and support.

When a society doesn't have standards of respect and justice for all people, the society fails morally. Join us to become global advocates to work together toward an [end of gender-based violence](#).

Reflection

What surprises you about this story?

What is the power of hearing from the silenced voice in this story?

How can we serve those who are marginalized based on their gender?

What are some ways our society can help to protect and heal marginalized women?

Prayer

God of love and healing, help us to "Love one another with mutual affection and outdo one another in showing honor." (Romans 12:10) Amen.

Other resources

[Rape as an Instrument of War](#)

[World Count, Gender-Based Violence \(Violence Against Women and Girls\)](#)