Unleashed and Exposed: The Canaanite Within

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 August 2015 Preacher: Chris Thornton

[0:00] Has anyone seen that video before? That video is trending now on social media. It's got more than 13 million views all around the world.

It's touched a real chord with a lot of people. And I think in a society where we've said that the Bible's view of sin, the Bible's view of morality doesn't count, and it's primitive, it's restrictive, it's hypocritical.

And when you even look in the passage like today, and you see so much violence and sexism and just terrible, terrible things, it seems justified for the culture to say, well, we don't want to listen to the Bible's view of right and wrong.

And we define what right and wrong says ourselves according to our cultural values, whether that's Eastern or whether that's Western. And yet our culture, as the video shows, is actually dripping with shame.

It is filled, in Chinese culture we call it saving face. And that's a technical way of saying applying makeup to cover up your shame. And as I look in this passage, to be honest, this is one of the, I think this is the most grotesque passage in the whole Bible.

[1:31] I really, I don't want to preach on this, but actually, if you're new here today, I'm sorry you came for this one. Like, maybe you can go away to Starbucks and come back next week.

But we're, I mean, this is a disturbing, disturbing passage. Let's just be real, let's just be honest. It really is sick, I think, in many ways.

But the reason why we go through the Bible is because these passages, I don't think are irrelevant to our culture.

I think they are totally relevant. And I think this passage has got something very powerful that every one of us needs to hear in the 21st century. We've been looking through this series in the book of Judges.

Judges is a dark book, but it's a book where the basic premise is that God has called his people to be a holy people, to be living in his light, reflecting him to the nations around.

[2:38] And yet the people of God have turned away from him and they have chosen to follow all the idols of everybody else around them. And as they have followed the idols, then they have become more and more like the people around them.

And the phrase that you see at the beginning of the passage is, in those days, there was no king in Israel. Well, there was a king, which was God, but they rejected him. And you know, when you turn away from God, when you put anything above God, you don't turn to nothing.

You turn to the idols of those around you. What everybody else worships, that's what you turn to. And that's what the Israelites turned to. And the light that they were meant to be had grown dimmer and dimmer until it had just gone dark.

And we're going to look through this story. And I know for some of you, this is going to be, this is a tough, tough story. But we're going to look through at it. And then I want to just bring out three things.

I want to talk about how other people's sin dehumanizes us, devalues us. How our sin dehumanizes us.

[3:51] And our need for a savior, for cleansing in this. So let's, if you've got your bulletin in front of you, let's just walk through this story as well as we can.

Because the story starts with a Levite. And Levites were the priests. They were the religious people. They were the pastors in the society. And this pastor, this priest, this Levite, he has a concubine, which is basically a second wife.

But a wife who has little value. A wife who is just there for sex, having kids, and maybe looking after some of the extra household jobs that need doing. And we don't know where his first wife had got to, but it's obvious that things are not going pretty well with their relationship because the concubine runs away.

And she runs back to her father. And four months later, the Levite comes. And he comes back to the house. Maybe he's missing the sex. Maybe he's just finding, oh, there's too much jobs around the house to do.

But four months later, he comes back. And he comes to the dad's home. And he stays. And the father of this concubine does over-the-top hospitality. And he stays three nights.

[5:03] And then after three nights, the Levite's thinking, I've got to go. But he said, oh, just have another drink. Just have some more food. You know, it's a bit like going to your relatives. You know, and they're there like, we've just cooked this for you.

You're trying to get out of the door. But they still insist. And he does this for another day. He stays on. And finally, he puts his foot down and says, no, we've got to go. We've got to go back. So they started heading off.

And it's beginning to get dark. And the servant says, well, it's getting dark. Why don't we go and stay in the city over there? That city is called Jabus. It's a city which is filled with Canaanites who are the enemies of God.

And the Levite naturally says, you've got to be joking. It's a city of foreigners. We're not going to stay in there. It's a bit like in the Second World War if you're a Chinese guy and you suggest to them, okay, why don't you go and stay in that Japanese hostel?

You know, it's not going to happen. That's the feeling that they would have. And so they move on to the Israelite town of Gibeah. And they walk in and they go in and they sit down in the square.

[6:07] And when you sit down in the square, it's a sign that you want somewhere to stay. It's a bit like going into a hotel lobby and just waiting at the check-in desk. You know, it's clear that you want to stay.

But nobody comes to serve you. That would be weird in our culture. In their culture, it was incredibly weird because you see how the Father shows incredible hospitality.

Hospitality was one of the ways that you showed your honor in the society. But this is a place which seems to have no honor and is shaming these people.

But just when they're giving up hope, the Levite, then suddenly this old guy, an immigrant to the town from their area, comes along. He's an old farmer, comes down, sees them, takes pity on them, says, hey, you can come back to my place.

And then he says this very chilling phrase. He says, only do not spend the night in the square. You know, don't stay in the hotel lobby.

You know, you can see if it was a movie that the music would start playing in the background. But then the man carries on as normally, brings him back. They have the equivalent of a shower. They're enjoying themselves.

There's food, there's drink, and then there's this knock at the door. And the knock gets louder and louder and louder. And they hear voices shouting outside saying, bring out the guy inside there, we want to have sex with him.

That's what the word no means in Hebrew. And the farmer is shocked because the social norms of the day told him that if you have a male guest in your house, it is your honor to look after him.

You protect him with your life because if he allowed anything to happen to him, his reputation was on the line. The whole of his family would be shamed.

And so he goes out to try and bargain with these guys. And they're crowding up around him. And he goes to them and he says, well, just have my daughter, have my concubine, his concubine, have anything but save this man, protect this man because in that society, the rape of a man was more dishonorable than the rape of a woman.

[8:25] That's what society said. And so they don't seem to listen to this. They're insistent. They're determined. They're wild. And so the Levite who's inside is hearing this.

He sees like he is right, they're heading right for him. So what does he do? In terror, he takes his concubine, throws her out of the door, brings the host back inside, slams the door and breathes a sigh of relief.

At least I'm safe. What about the concubine? You see, that seems to satisfy the men. The concubine has a night of horrific torture.

I mean horrific. When she gets back in the morning, she's half dead. She's so broken, so damaged that she collapses in front of the door. She can't even open the door.

Handle. The narrator switches back to the Levite. What's he been doing all night? Has he been fretting about what's happening to his concubine?

[9:28] Has he been pacing up and down, regretting what he'd done? Not at all. You see, it says, when he rose up in the morning and opened the doors of his house to go on his way, in other words, he's had a good night's sleep.

He was about to carry on just as normal, as if nothing had happened. Maybe I'll have a bit of breakfast. And then he opens the door, and what does he see? He sees his concubine there lying in the way.

And like a dog, he says, get up. Let's go on the way. There's no sound. So he picks her up, presumably puts her on a donkey like a sack of potatoes, takes her back to his hometown.

We don't yet know whether she's dead or not. The author deliberately leaves it vague. And he's angry. He's brooding on what has happened to him.

He's angry because he's lost maybe his chance for sex here. He's angry because of the way he's been treated in this. And so he hatches a plan for revenge. And he uses a known shock tactic of the time.

[10:37] Because if you want to gather people together for a fight, you shock them into coming. And what he does, what people would normally do, they take an animal and they would cut them up and they would send them around and say, look at what has happened.

You need to come here. We need to deal with this. King Saul does this later on in 1 Samuel. But this is not an animal. This is his concubine that he cuts up.

And the tactic works because everybody is shocked out of their minds. They cannot believe that this is happening. Never before, they say, such a thing has never happened or been seen from the day that the people of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt until this day.

This is the Levites' call for revenge. How do you feel about that story? It's quite shocking, isn't it?

It's quite sick. And can you believe that actually the Bible, which is supposed to be God's word, has a story like this in it? I don't know if you've ever watched one of those movies where you, you know, you see the baddie and you just want the bad guy to die.

[11:52] Have you ever got to that point? You know, it's, I don't know, Lord Voldemort in Harry Potter and you know, when it gets to the end and he's about to die and you're going, yes! Because, and maybe sometimes that kind of shows you a little bit about yourself, but, but we get angry when we see evil and abuse and this story is written to make you angry.

It's written to leave you disgusted with the level of depravity of how sin can lead you into. That's the purpose. They don't have 3D but he uses this shocking image.

It's meant to leave you crying out, seeing how low Israel has gone and how much they need a saviour. That's the point of this story.

And it's interesting because the incident mirrors exactly what happens in the book of Genesis in the town of Sodom. Sodom was a pagan city and there again they had almost exactly the same incident where a group of men want to rape a couple of male angelic visitors.

And the story, the narrator uses exactly the same number of words. It's deliberate because what he's saying is Sodom, which was a pagan city, was exactly like or rather Israel, which is meant to be the people of God, is exactly like the Canaanites.

[13:21] Exactly the same. Canaan has become into the hearts of Israel. They've rejected God, they've put other things above him and now they look like everybody else.

you know, because the Canaanites, their lust reflected the gods that they worship. They worship gods of violence and sex. And the gods that you worship will be reflected.

You become like what you worship. You image what you worship. Someone put it like this, God's people are their own worst enemies. It's not the enemies outside who threaten the soul, but the Canaanite within.

You become like what you worship. So what do we learn? What do we learn from this story? Here's our three things that we're going to learn.

First of all, other people's idolatry and sin dehumanizes us. And I realize this is going to be difficult for some of us. We've had a spate of babies born in our congregation.

[14:28] And you know when you see a mother or a father doting over their child and everyone else comes and says oh, who do they look like? Do they look like the father? Okay. Is it, oh, he's got the father's eyes, he's got the mother's nose, got the grandfather's nasal hair, something like that.

And they look at it and your appearance is directly, and this is very unfortunate for some of us, shaped by your parents. Right?

Now, if you are born in the royal family, you're Kate Middleton's whatever son, I've lost track of the gossip, or Prince William or Prince Harry, you have an identity which is shaped by your heritage.

You're valuable. Now, what the Bible says about us, what God says is, unlike normal parents, we have been created by our father who's the king of the universe in his image.

What that means is we have dignity, value, and worth because you are uniquely stamped with the fingerprints of a loving, beautiful, glorious God.

You are beautiful, what the video said, you're beautiful because you are made in the image of a beautiful God. You see, you have got serious street value.

Jack Ma can't afford you. Li Ka Shing can't buy shares in you. Tao Bao cannot sell you. Christie's cannot auction you. The stock market cannot trade you because you're priceless, because you're made in the image of a glorious God.

God. That's what the Bible says. That's where your value comes from. So why do we feel angry when we see people abused and mistreated?

It's because you know that beneath the surface there is something of intricate, infinite worth and value about people. It's because you're made in the image of a glorious God.

That's where your value comes from. But in this society, in this passage, the Canaanites and therefore the Israelites had replaced the image of God for other images.

[16:57] And I think our society does exactly the same. And if you kick God out of the picture, then where does your worth and value come from? Think about it. If you're just a bunch of chemicals, the result of millions of years of evolution, then you have no other intrinsic worth other than what other people say about you or what you say about yourself.

And if culture and culture's idols say this is what is valuable and you don't meet the standard of what is valuable, then you're treated as worthless.

And you live in shame like many of those people in the video. But if you do meet the standard of beauty or whatever it is, then you'll look down on other people who don't meet that standard.

Because, did you see at the end of the video, do you see it says, she said, don't let anyone tell you, you're beautiful, don't let anyone tell you differently, not even yourself. Did you read that? Because those are the two criteria that our society judges people by.

It's yourself and what other people say about you. And she is appealing for something more than that, but she doesn't tell you where it is. The Bible does. And in this story, this is precisely what is going on.

[18:19] The concubine is being judged by the standards of the day which said women are inferior, they aren't worth as much, they're just sex objects, they're there to provide men what they want, they're worth very little.

That's why the host is willing to sacrifice his daughter. And the concubine, they are shamed and dehumanized because they have removed that sense of the image of God.

And we think in our kind of very enlightened 21st century minds, how barbaric is that? We are so much better, we've overturned so many prejudices, aren't we great?

But think about the idols in our society. How are we valued? How are we and who do we devalue? How are we? The video shows you one of the big idols.

Physical appearance is such a massive idol in our culture. You look at every advert around. You know, I watch rational, sensible men and women who are terrified to leave their flat because a pimple comes on their face.

[19:27] I see parents telling their grown-up children who have just about got enough flesh to hold their bones together that they're fat. And that defines you.

I see grown men at the gym spending more time looking in the mirror just to see whether the bicep grows as you look at it. And I do it myself, although I have to look a little longer because I've got to find the muscles.

But, you know, you look at a group photo and what is your first thing you've got to look for? You look for yourself.

What's the first thing you think? Do I look okay? Right? If you do, if you're looking a little cute, sexy, you know, wow, you feel worth something. You feel valuable. But if you just got the wrong side of you, you know, you look a little fatter, your nose is a little longer, are you going to show that to all your friends and say, here's my latest photo?

No, because if we don't meet up to the standard we set ourselves and society sets us, then we feel inadequate, shamed, worthless. We don't want to come out.

[20:38] That's the idol of appearance because our worth is assessed in how you look. One pimple and you're gone. We're shamed.

But it's not just physical appearance. We also have the idol of social appearance. Chinese culture calls it face. But I was sitting in a restaurant a while back and there was a boy and his mother sitting there and the boy reached over to try and grab the menu and as he did, he grabbed the menu, he knocked a cup off the table and it went flying, smashing on the ground.

For the next two minutes, his mother laid into him and said, you're useless.

Can't you do anything right? Why can't you do what I tell you to do? She said, you're so stupid.

Aren't you worth anything? And the boy protested that it was an accident that he'd done but his mother continued criticizing, cutting him down until the boy went quiet.

[21:54] That mother had dehumanized her son. Someone made in the image of God and had said, your value is found in your good behavior.

Your value is found in getting things right. Your value is found in making me look like a good mother. Because that's the idol of social appearance.

And many of us carry around the shame of being dehumanized, devalued by the comments of others, by the abuse, whether physical, whether verbal, whether sexual, whether any of these things.

And it makes us feel like nothing. Because we are shamed by other people. Ignored, criticized, judged.

And the problem with this is that that's why we're workaholics. that's why we're perfectionists. Because all of our work, all of our sense of trying to achieve and get success, so much of that is just plastering makeup on us, on our souls, because we're trying to cover the sense of inadequacy we feel in so many parts of our lives.

Because if I get success in that, then maybe people won't see what really is going on inside. Because how you appear in our culture determines your value.

sin and it leaves us dehumanized, shamed, devalued. But it's not just other people who put that shame onto us and we live with.

It's also our own sin and this is the second point. Our own sin dehumanizes us. You see, you look at the Levite. he's a religious man supposed to be looking after caring for his wife.

But what he does, he treats her like an animal. And as he treats her in that way, he becomes like an animal. You know, that's what, if it was in the newspapers, he'd be called a monster, a beast, an animal.

Why? Because in some way, his humanity has become disfigured and distorted from what it's meant to be. And what you see in this story is that he's no longer reflecting the image of God.

[24:32] You know, you know Lord of the Rings. There's a character called Gollum. Gollum was once a river hobbit until one day he saw and found a ring of power.

And as he got hold of that ring of power, his quest to keep hold of it, his precious, began to twist and began to warp and began to distort him until he became this pale, kind of weedy figure.

You know the story. And he's barely recognizable as a hobbit in the end. Yeah? All he can think about is his precious.

If he can get his precious, that's everything. But you look at him and you have pity upon him because he's not the hobbit that he was meant to be. That's what's happened to the Levite.

He is no longer that beautiful, loving, God-honoring image of God. And he cannot even see his own distortion because he's angry at everybody else's sin.

[25:39] Can't even see his own. Canaan has entered his heart and it's disfigured him. And the point is this, that it's not just other people who devalue us.

It's our own sinfulness which devalues us. And the thing is, how do you, and we feel shame from these things, but how do you actually make yourself feel better when you know that you have sinned, when you know you've done these things?

How do you make yourself feel better? Well, if you look down on other people, you can feel a little bit better about yourself. Right? Because if you have your standard and you've met your standard and somebody else hasn't, well at least there's something that I can be proud of.

And I just, I feel this and I'm going to be honest with you, I think this is, this is so prevalent in my heart and in all of our hearts that it actually keeps us locked in in this sense of shame.

You see, I see a mainland mother on the MTR and her kids are going crazy and she's doing nothing and what do I do in my mind? I say, what kind of a mother are you?

[26:53] Can't you have any discipline? And I look down on her. Someone made in the image of God. The other day, a homeless guy who I've said hi to a few times came up to me and he said hi and he came over and shook my hand like this and as he came and shook my hand, I pulled my hand back because I felt contaminated as he did that.

I felt like I didn't want to be touched by this guy. I'll be polite to him but I didn't want to be touched by him but I went away feeling ashamed of myself.

This man made in the image of God and I had treated him like that. You see, that is the Levite in me. That is Gollum in me.

That is the Canaanite in me and I've stopped imaging this glorious loving God and I've become by my own sin disfigured and it brings me shame.

I don't know how it works for you. How do you use your tongue? Do you criticize and point out every mistake that your spouse, that your kids, that your colleagues make?

[28:13] Because every time we do all of those things we devalue people. We value them just based on how good they are, how well they can perform and yet do we see people made in the image of a glorious God?

And we dehumanize ourselves when we do that. You know, I could talk on and on and we could talk about how pornography, we could talk about how helpers are viewed, we could talk about your workplace and how we are dehumanized in the workplace, we could do all of that.

But what this passage is trying to do, this is the heart of it, it's trying to expose us because we want to hide and it's trying to bring us out into the open and say, be real, be real and face your shame and those things inside of you.

Be real. Some of you are offended that I might even dare to call us, to call you like one of the Levites.

But you know, because you think, I'm an okay person, but now, I am a nice, middle-class Englishman. I haven't raped anyone, I haven't murdered anyone, I haven't fiddled my taxes, I haven't stolen paper clips from the office, I have a large amount of watermark pens at my home, but that doesn't count.

But, if you were to show a video of my life, every thought, every word, every action. And, that videotape, somebody took and said, they're going to play it in Times Square in Causeway Bay tonight.

And they're going to invite all my friends and family. Do you know what? I think I'd want to get that tape back. Do you know what?

Because, could you stand with the tape of your life in front of people and have nobody getting angry at you for the way that you have behaved towards others?

Because I couldn't. That is my shame. That is where I have been disfigured. And I would want to fast forward large parts of that video.

This is heavy, heavy stuff. It's not kind of nice, light, fluffy, fluffy Bible. But just as the financial crisis exposed greed and the hideous nature of greed in our society which we had said was okay, so God wants to use this passage to expose the shame that is caused by others and is caused by ourselves.

[31:03] That disfigurement, He wants to expose it into the light because He wants to deal with it. He wants to restore us back to the image that He made us. someone once said you can't deal, the only issues you can't deal with in your life are the ones you deny.

The only issues you can't deal with in your life are the ones you deny. Because we all, if we are honest, every single one of us in this room has skeletons in our closet.

And do you know what we do? We try and hide the skeletons and keep in front of the door so nobody else will see that there is a skeleton in the door, in the closet. The problem with that is the longer you try and cover it up there is always going to be a skeleton in the closet.

It is only as you begin to open the closet and allow the skeleton to come out that you can begin to have a clean, free closet without shame, without fear, without having to hide any longer.

But if you keep the closet door shut, you will always have a skeleton haunting you, enslaving you, making you afraid of what everyone else will find out about you. No matter how much makeup we try and apply to our hearts and our lives, through our career success, through our appearance, through all these different things, you will never remove it

Because when you are alone in the room, the makeup has come off. So what is your shame? What's your shame? What is it that you don't want anyone else to know about?

What is it that you're hiding? Because God wants to open the door of your heart to let the skeletons out so he can restore you and remove that shame from our lives.

Other people's sin dehumanizes us. Our own sin dehumanizes us. It brings us shame. It brings us inadequacy. This passage is written to show that we need a savior.

We need cleansing because we can't do it ourselves. So here's the last point. In Jesus' day, there was a group of people who were despised, who were dripping, culted with that same shame.

they were lepers. They were disfigured. They suffered from a skin disease which meant that anyone who touched them would become unclean. So everyone would, in fear, run away from them.

[33:42] They had to walk. If they walked through the village, they would have to shout, unclean, unclean, so that everyone else would go near them and would not be contaminated. They were shamed, disfigured, dehumanized by the society.

Jesus came along. One day, one of these lepers runs up to him, falls on his knees, begs him, if you are willing, Jesus, you can make me clean.

Do you know what Jesus does? He doesn't say, oh, be clean, okay, now go off and live a good life. Do you know what he does?

Mark 1 says this. Jesus stretched out his hand and he touched the man. He touched him.

Nobody had touched that man in years. but Jesus touched him because he wanted to restore his humanity to him and in touching him, do you know what happened?

[34:56] Jesus became unclean. He took the uncleanness on himself and that man went away with a new humanity.

Jesus then said, I'm willing to make you clean. Be clean. And every single one of us are like those lepers, maybe from other people's sin, maybe from our own sin who have got that shame and Jesus wants us to run to him to come with our shame and to say, are you willing to make me clean?

And Jesus will not just say, be clean, but he wants to reach out wherever that skeleton in your closet is and he wants to touch you and restore your humanity.

If we keep plastering makeup on ourselves, you know, Gollum wearing makeup is not a pretty sight. God of creation wants us not to hide any longer.

He wants us to be a community where we are not looking down on each other, not devaluing each other by your appearance, by how good you are, by all the things that you've done, but actually I can come to one or two people and I can bear my closet before you and you will not judge me because you look at me and say, made in the image of God.

[36:33] Jesus is the one who's going to restore you. Let me point you to him. Because if the devil comes to you and whispers, yeah, but if you open the closet, what are people going to think of you?

What are people going to say about you? And if you've already confessed it before God and if you've already confessed it to one or two people in this congregation, do you know what?

You would just say, well, I've got nothing to hide. The skeleton's out. I don't have to live in shame. Do you see how free that is?

That you don't have to hold behind trying to keep the things inside when God can begin to heal you. This city is a city in your workplace, in your family, in your own hearts where we're dripping with shame.

It needs us to start that process, to be brave, to take the initiative like that lady did in the movie. But to see that our hope is that we have a savior who is so great that he says, you are worth something because you're made in my image and because I reach down to touch and restore you.

[37:58] That is the gospel. That's the gospel our city needs. That says, community we are called to be where we can be open, knowing that we are loved, we are valued, we are worth something.

That concubine never knew it because of the idols that were in the society. If we put God first, we can be a light that Israel never was.

Let's pray. I'd like you just to be very honest with yourself now.

We're very rarely very honest. but there's not one person in this room who does not have shame from either what others have done to you or what you yourself have done.

What is that thing that you do not want anybody else to know about? That's your shame. Jesus is asking you right now to be real with him, to run to him with that shame.

[39:18] Just like you just to take a minute just to think about that. That Jesus is here wanting to restore you with a freedom that we don't have to hide any longer.

just spend a minute with just sharing your heart to God now. Confess to him. Let him touch you and heal you.

Amen. statement.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

[40:31] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Father, I want to pray for each one of us here.

Some of us have deep wounds from the past which we don't really want to face. Some of us think we're okay. We can't even see how we could ever be like the Levite.

But Lord, I pray that you would help us to be honest. But not honest to condemn us, honest to free us. Thank you that you do not judge us.

That you knew the depth of our hearts and yet you died on that cross. You who were shameless.

You had no sin. You were disfigured. You were humiliated. You were scorned and despised for us.

[42:01] Because of our sin. Because of our shame. That we could be free. Thank you. I pray, Lord, that you would just do that deep work, Lord.

I pray for each one of us to have a boldness, Lord. I pray that... I pray, Lord, for those who here just want to keep it between you and them.

But actually, that fear will still grip them until they actually share it with somebody else. I pray that you give them courage right now. To think who they can actually go and share that shame with.

And I pray for that person that they would have that heart to see. That you are the one who restores every shame. That there's no shame too bad. And even the Levite, if he turned to you, you would forgive.

And you would restore. In spite of the horrific things. That is offensive, Lord, to many of us. But, Lord, that is...

[43:15] We all need that. Please, would you do your work in us. Set us free. Okay. Okay. I'm out.