

Brand New Name, Same Old Story

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[0 : 00] Well, I wonder how you felt hearing those words from the book of Genesis. A couple of months ago, I started watching a TV series called Bump.

I think it's in its fourth season now, though I had a bit of catching up to do. In episode one, a high school girl gives birth to a surprise baby. It's a concealed pregnancy. Everyone's in shock. As the shock wears off, it turns out that it's not her boyfriend's baby. Rather, she's had a one-night stand with another boy in her school some months ago.

Things get even more complicated, though, as we learn that the girl's mom is having an affair with that boy's dad, who are both teachers at the school, and her dad goes on to meet someone else as well.

The girl is distraught when her parents tell her that they are separating. And she is very upset when her friends start hooking up with her baby's daddy's friends.

[1 : 04] The main storyline is actually that the dad wants to be involved, but they can't really decide whether they should be together or not. In the end, I didn't actually get past series one, because watching these characters trying to feel their way through the chaos of their own lives was like watching hours of people groping around in a dark room, trying to find a light switch, and never finding it.

And actually, the more they reached out and tried to find this light switch on the wall, it's like the room only got darker, as if they were wiping the darkness off their hands and onto every surface of this room, onto each other.

The most painful thing, though, was actually watching the writers try to bend the story into some kind of moral truth or lesson. It was viewers who were meant to cheer for everyone's sexual freedom and cry for the harm that it did to everybody else.

The characters are selfish, but we're not supposed to think that. We're supposed to be sympathetic without ever stating the obvious, which is that the whole thing is utterly wrong, and that nothing that any of them are doing comes anywhere close to fixing it.

Friends, welcome to God's family. Welcome to the people in the book of Genesis. TV like that proves that over 4,000 years, we haven't changed.

[2 : 44] The difference is, I think, that while the world wants to hide the obvious, the Bible simply wants to show us what's there and confront us with it and for us to own it.

Genesis is not trying to bend this into something that we can feel good about. It's simply showing us what's there so that we can feel how wrong it is and how helpless we are to do anything about it.

So what are we meant to do with a chapter like this in the Bible? Well, I think like this. In the sections just before and after this, God gives the head of this family, Jacob, a new name, Israel. His name was Cheat. Now it's God Clinger. But in between, we have this, which shows us, doesn't it, how deeply that old name and that old identity is still ingrained in him and in his family.

Right? Brand new name, same old story. To teach us, I think, that although if our trust is in Christ today, we do have a new heart, a God-given identity, a new family, and a new life, we still very much have it in us to lie, cheat, and steal when we are lied to, cheated, and stolen from.

[4 : 20] We still very much meet sin with sin. And that can only bring us to one conclusion about them and about us. But before we see it, we need to get our hands dirty and pick up the mess and sort through it a little bit, don't we?

And that's what we're going to do in our first points. Can sex be a sin? In one sense, the story's clear-cut, isn't it?

Even to our ears, Dinah goes out, and when Shechem, the son of Hamel the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he seized her, lay with her, and humiliated her. He rapes her.

There's no bubble wrap here. The Bible is real about life. And terrible sexual violence is real in a sinful world. As I reflected on that, I was thankful to God that in our society, we know that rape is a sin.

People wouldn't use that word, would they? But they act like it. It's condemned in our laws and in our culture. But some people know, perhaps you know personally, that not every humiliation gets its day in court.

[5 : 37] There are enough of us in this room that we can safely assume that some of us have been treated like this in one way or another. And you need to know, if that is ye this morning, that whatever was said, or whatever was done, or not done, or whatever a court decided or didn't decide, that God says that sex that is forced upon someone is a sin.

It should never happen. It is wrong. And we know it says that here because the way it's described is an echo of the original sin. Genesis uses a sequence of four words to describe Eve breaking God's command and eating the fruit she saw, she took, she ate, she gave.

Now just look in your Bible at that very similar string of words at the end of verse 2 in chapter 34.

Look. He saw, he seized, he lay, and he gave her something.

Right? Humiliation, shame. It's actually even closer in the original language. This is Genesis' way of saying that what happened to Dinah is a ripple out from that original sin.

God forbids men from treating women in this way and women men. But he saw, he took, he laid, and he brought shame into an act which God created for men and women to be naked and feel no shame.

[7 : 14] But it gets even messier because of the human heart. Now if this was a TV series, Shechem and Dinah would be casting a shadow up on the wall that looks like Adam and Eve after they fell.

Well with that shadow behind them, just hear these words in verse 3, and his soul was drawn to or held fast to Dinah, the daughter of Jacob. He loved the young woman and spoke tenderly tenderly to her or he spoke to her heart.

Now these words do not redeem him, but they do show us, don't they, that the human heart is not simple or uncomplicated. The Bible condemns rape, but it does not dehumanize rapists.

He has done something to Dinah, but his act has done something to him too. It has married him to her. And that is what sex is supposed to do.

Sex is to bind two people into one flesh. Just stepping back for a little minute, when we say sex is for marriage, that doesn't only mean that sex is to be saved for marriage, but that sex actually marries us to someone in our hearts, in our bodies.

[8 : 39] It's not a weird rule, it's just what sex does. It's created, designed to knit two into one. But here, it's all the wrong way around, isn't it?

Adam spoke tenderly to Eve's heart. What did he say? Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh. For this reason, for that reason, says Genesis, a man shall hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

And there, in that relationship, they can be naked and feel no shame. But what has Shechem done? Shamed Dinah by making himself one flesh with her, and then finding that his heart hold fast to her, and then speaking tenderly to her, and then wanting her for his wife.

It's all upside down, isn't it? It's all the wrong way around. Friends, our world has taught us that sex can be casual, no strings attached.

We can play with it like a toy. But to borrow an illustration, David Gibson says, sex is like fire. Put fire in the right place, in the log burner, in the oven, and it makes a family home.

[9 : 58] take it out of that proper place. Play with it, and it can burn the house down. Here's a man who played with sex, and all the carnage of the rest of the chapter is really him just trying to put it all back in the box, isn't it?

But he can't. He thought he was in control, but he was playing with fire, so it shouldn't surprise us when the house starts burning.

Now, it's easy to stand here and say that rape is sin because our world cheers. It is harder to stand here and say that sex outwith marriage is sin because our world laughs.

Right? Look, he loved her. He loved her. And our world says, doesn't it, that it is a sin, if anything, it's a sin to deny how you feel, to deny your heart what you desire.

But when it says in verse 7 that Jacob's sons were indignant and very angry because he'd done an outrageous thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, it's talking not only about the rape, the fact that it is forced upon her, but the sex.

[11:18] What he did. The lesson that we are taught every day by our world is that if adults consent to sex, then anything that they then do is fine. That's the air that we breathe.

And friends, consent is important. But the word that the Bible would have flash up in our minds when we think about sex is covenant.

Covenant, marriage. Dinah didn't consent, but whether she had consented or not, what Shechem did in lying with her is an outrageous thing. That should never have happened.

Love, attraction, the desire for marriage, sweet words spoken to one another. It is a right thing, a good thing for men and women to feel towards each other, but this is the wrong thing to do with that feeling.

If you're interested in someone, brothers, speak to her heart, win her over. And if you do, then marry her and then take her to bed.

[12:25] And neither of you need be shamed or humiliated. Light the fire in the right place and it will make a family home. God created sex as part of his good creation, but be in no doubt we can use sex to sin.

And the Bible insists from beginning to end that that sin begins not in the act, but in the heart. And I can't imagine that there is anyone here today, myself included, men or women, whose heart is not stung by that truth.

Because God's good design, it's so different, isn't it, from what the world teaches us every day about love, sex, and relationships. And though we do have a new name and a new identity in Christ, a new heart, that old heart still beats in us, doesn't it, as it did in God's family then.

But now let's look at the reaction to that mess in our second point, deceitfulness squared. Jacob hears what's happened to his daughter.

Soon the two dads get together for a talk. Notice though, look at verse 6, that it's Shechem's dad who goes to speak to Jacob, not the other way around. In fact, he doesn't say anything until verse 30.

[13:51] He held his peace, supposedly, he says, until his sons were back from the fields. But once they're back, he kind of lets them do the talking, doesn't he?

Not exactly the response that you would hope for from your dad if you were Dinah, especially because did you spot that Dinah isn't home yet?

Right? The brothers have to go and get her in verse 26 because she's still in Shechem's house. If that was one of our daughters, would holding your peace be an option for you?

Would you not phone the police? Go and get her. Jacob says and does nothing. Sadly, commentators think Genesis gives us the reason there in verse 1 that she was Leah's daughter, the wife he never wanted, perhaps the daughter he never wanted too.

Reading Genesis is a bit like watching a car crash in slow motion, isn't it? As the favoritism that so damaged Jacob growing up now hits his children too.

[15:02] Meanwhile, Shechem's dad is playing the role of the patriarch very nicely. He's come to get the wedding plans sorted. He gives the kind of speech even that you'd expect the father of the bride to give at a wedding.

You know, we're so happy to see these two families come together. Look at this in verse 9. Look, make marriages with us. Give your daughters to us.

Take our daughters for yourselves. You will dwell with us. The land is open to you. Dwell and trade in it. Get property in it. Our home is your home. It's an open door.

Let's all become one flesh or one people as they put it in verse 22. It sounds so generous, doesn't it? Make yourselves at home.

Our people will be your people. Our home will be your home. Of course, the Bible warns from beginning to end that that sentence always ends, our gods will be your gods.

[16:01] But the Lord has created this family to bring his blessing to every family of the earth, not to become like or one with every family. And that is why he forbids marrying the people of the land, to preserve, to pass on a unique identity as God's people.

And as it turns out, their offer isn't quite as generous as it sounds, because secretly, Luke Shechem and his dad are plotting verse 23, will not their livestock, their property, and all their beasts be ours?

Right? It's not purely self-interested, isn't it? Jacob and the family, they would get the best of their stuff, but of course, marriage is a two-way street, and these guys, they're just eyeing up the enormous, the vast wealth that Jacob's brought home to Canaan with him. Their generous offer disguises a deceitful heart. With their mouths, they bless, and with their hearts, they curse.

You know, one of the things that I find convincing about the history that we're given in Genesis is just how real, how honest it is about what people are really like. You know, often the people that God's family deal with in the land are fair, they're pretty decent people, they even put God's family to shame.

[17 : 27] But it shouldn't surprise us either, should it, to meet people like this in the land, two people who are ready to do a dodgy deal. Because, of course, they don't know the God of truth.

The world is like that, isn't it? Some people you can trust, some people you can't. Genesis is real. But how does God's family respond to their tricks?

Well, remember that Jacob's sons, they're burning with rage because of what Shechem's done to their sister, and they know that they're not supposed to intermarry. And so, they pray to the Lord for his wisdom and guidance.

So, they counted up, they reminded themselves of all the acts of steadfast love and the faithfulness that God had shown their family through the generations. So, they told the Hivites what they had done was wicked and called them to repent.

They don't do any of that, do they? Not options A, B, or C. They come up instead with option D, a cunning plan. And we don't need to wonder about their motives.

[18 : 37] Verse 13 tells us, the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully. Because he defied their sister Dinah. They want revenge.

They are ready and willing to lie, cheat, and steal when they are lied to, cheated, and stolen from. These boys are deceivers, like father-like sons.

They've learned from the best, haven't they? And just like Jacob took God's name in vain when he lied to his dad, cheated his brother. So these sons have learned, haven't they, to take God's sign in vain when they lie to these guys.

We'll become one people with you, they say, as long as you're all circumcised. Now circumcision was the sign given to this family to set them apart from every other people.

You are my people, says the Lord. Let this mark be in your flesh that you belong to me. you are wedded to me in covenant, not to be used as a bargaining chip, and not to be used to debilitate your enemies, the better to kill them.

[19 : 51] To help us feel this, it would be a bit like inviting someone to be baptized and then drowning them in the water. Even saying that feels dirty, even thinking that, doesn't it?

And Genesis stresses how innocently the the Hivites trusted these brothers' words. Verse 18 says that their words pleased them. Now you've got to be pretty in love, haven't you, for someone to say, the only condition is that you need to get circumcised and to say, brilliant, bring it on!

Right? And all the people. Now why do they buy into that? Because Shechem tells them, verse 21, these men are at peace with us.

And so when all the men of the city do it and they're feeling the effects, the city, we're told, felt secure. They've taken the guard down.

They're not worried about what will happen. Genesis is saying they were dealing in good faith. Yes, they didn't tell the whole truth, but they were not trying to stab God's family in the back.

[21 : 01] Whereas God's family were very literally trying to stab them in the back. The Hivites don't see it coming at all when Jacob's sons take out their wrath on them and their families and everything they own.

Just glance down at verse 29 and take it in. All their wealth, all their little ones, all that was in their houses, they captured and plundered.

This is what God's family did to the people of the land. It's worth saying, friends, God is perfectly capable of wiping a city off the map for its sins.

He's done that before in Genesis. But all through the Old Testament, he always either gives a very specific command or he does that himself and always very sparingly.

He never leaves it up to people to take vengeance into their own hands. There's only the smallest grain of justice in what they do, isn't there, in rescuing their sister from a rapist, but the rest is

beyond the pale.

[22 : 14] And even if they had only done what was fair, the ends don't justify the means, do they? You can't take God's work into your own hands and do it in your own way, then it's not God's work.

And now I trust that none of us have done anything as drastic as this, as violent as this. But as we step back a little bit, we don't need to dig too deeply to see and to own what we do do as we live as Christians in a sinful and in a deceitful world.

Here's an example. Someone says something unfair or nasty behind your back and you pick it up. What do you do? What do you do? Do you pray for them? Do you forgive them? Do you perhaps gently challenge them, bring it into the light?

Or do you let it rot away in your heart over the weeks and months and years or start telling anyone who will listen what a terrible person, what a liar they are for having said that?

[23 : 29] Here's another example. Someone breaks their word, maybe they flake out on a commitment, they let you down. Do you pray for them? Do you find out how they are?

Do you give them a chance perhaps to apologize? Do you cut them out, stop talking to them? Do you play over and over in your head what you wish that you could say to them?

Do you tell your friends not to trust them? Do you get your own back on them and let them down?

See, even if you've never done that, if you've never punished anyone for the way that they've wronged you, we can all relate to that feeling or the temptation and desire even to do that, can't we?

We all have it in us to meet fire with fire, to meet sin with sin, to compound the problem. Haven't we all matched someone's passive aggressive words with pure aggressive words in our own hearts?

Can you honestly say that you've never chosen to nurse a grievance or hold a grudge for someone's, the way they've treated you?

[24 : 38] To put it the way that Jesus puts it, have you never murdered anyone in your hearts? We all have it in us, brothers and sisters, we all do it.

Because like Jacob and his family, our old nature and identity and name and self still lives in us.

Even now that we've got a new name and identity and heart and self in Christ, we've got a brand new name and new family and new life.

But don't we so often find with us that it's the same old story? And perhaps the struggle is getting better. That's what we pray for, isn't it?

That the struggle would get better, that we would grow as Christians into our new identity. But that struggle won't have gone away. The Bible assures us that we still need to fight however long you've been a Christian.

We still need to be in the battle every day to live out our new name and our new identity in Christ.

Colossians chapter 3 verse 9 and 10 says this, Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

[25 : 58] Every day it says put off the old, put on the new, because it's out of the new in Christ that we're enabled not to lie, hate, anger, but instead to love our enemies, to pray for those who hurt us, and to call them gently to turn from what they're doing wrong and trust in the Lord.

Now how real is that battle for you, brothers and sisters? And I'm not talking about a battle with people in your life, I'm talking about a battle with God and his word and his will for you and your heart in how you treat people who sin against you.

I wonder how often have you wrestled with that response in your heart over the past week? Could you pick out a time that you've chosen to put off anger and put on forgiveness?

Could you pick out a time when you've chosen to put off lying and put on speaking the truth in love? That struggle, that very battle, that is who we are now, that is our identity, isn't it?

It's wrestling with God's will for our lives and clinging to him as we struggle to live out his way of life in our day to day. If that feels like a battle for you, let me encourage you, that's how it's meant to feel.

[27 : 30] It doesn't come easy. It's a struggle. It's who we are. Next time you're hurt, you're wronged or sinned against, ask yourself, am I reacting like Jacob the cheat?

Or like Israel the God clinger? Is this the old me doing the talking or is it the new me in Christ doing the talking? Because apart from him, apart from the new life, he freely gives us, we have no real solution, no way forward.

And this is our final point, the final two verses of our chapter. And now the smoke clears, the brothers return, don't they? Dinah's home safe, but they're not a happy family, are they? Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, you've brought trouble on me by making me stink to the inhabitants of the land. He says, you've wrecked my reputation, right? And you've opened us up to being attacked by other people if they gather their forces, we'll be destroyed. So daddy Jacob, right, head of the household, his only concern is for himself. [28 : 38] Everyone hates me, he says. And his only complaint is that what they did wasn't very strategic. Now we're on the back foot, he says.

No word about Dinah. No word about the unspeakable things that his sons have done, slaughtering, capturing women and children. Nothing we could call moral outrage or righteous anger in Jacob. Plus, of course, he should have taken the lead in the first place and wrestled with God over the whole thing as the head of the family instead of doing and saying absolutely nothing until now. And the chapter ends not with a very satisfying conclusion, but with a question. But, they said, should he treat our sister like a prostitute?

The answer, of course, is no. But by leaving us with a question, the chapter is making the point that nothing that they or anyone has said or done has really answered the question.

[29 : 55] Jacob said and did nothing. He failed his family. His sons did everything in their power to take revenge and committed an atrocity. And yet, in the end, they're still at a loss for what to do or what they should have done.

You didn't do it right, says Jacob. What could we have done, the brothers say? Hardly a satisfying ending, is it? See, friends, Genesis wants to confront us this morning with the fact that we have no real human solution to problems like this.

Rape, torture, murder, kidnapping, war. In much of our culture, there is a sense of total outrage, isn't there? There's no way back for people like this.

Cancel them. Cancel these sinners from public life. Wipe their names off the face of the earth. Let them not be remembered. In much of our culture, there is also a total avoidance, isn't there?

Ignore it. Don't listen. Don't read the news. Don't talk about those things. Don't bring it up. And we're stuck exactly where this family is stuck at the end of this chapter, aren't we?

[31 : 07] No way forward with the wrongs that are done. No real solution. Just questions. But God has given this family a new name and a new identity, which should have opened up the way for them.

Cling to God. God, cling. I wrestle with him. Strive with him. They are those who wrestle with his word and do not let him go without his blessing.

And that is us today as the church of Christ. That is you if you're a Christian today. And if we take hold of and live out that new identity in a sinful world, we respond to wrongs out of that new heart. Bad things will still happen. But we won't compound sin with sin. We won't meet fire with fire.

We won't lie, cheat, and steal when we are lied to, cheated, and stolen from. We'll meet sin with grace. And evil with prayer. And hurt with forgiveness.

[32 : 17] We'll hold out a chance to turn and say sorry to whoever has wronged us and whatever they have done.

We'll hold out the hope of Christ. And we'll trust God with the outcome. Bad things in this world won't always end well, brothers and sisters.

But there is a right way forward, friends, as we navigate a sinful and a deceitful world. And it is for us to hold on to the God who gave his own son to be tortured and killed so that he could forgive people whose hearts are full of murder.

And redeem people who have said and thought and done awful things. And heal people who have suffered in terrible ways. And bless every family of the earth.

Even though we have done everything in our power to earn his punishment. If you feel stuck this morning and don't know how to move forward with wrong that you've suffered or that you've seen or that you've done, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ holds out his hands to you and says, take hold of me and walk with me and you will find a way forward and a better way than this world can offer or teach us.

[33 : 49] Cling to me. Don't let me go. And I will redeem you and bless you and give you a new start, a new heart and a new identity. And I will be with you.

Friends, he is our way forward. He is our solution and a lasting solution. So would you take hold of him today? Do that and cling to him and walk with him from this day forward.

Let's pray for that for each other, for ourselves. Let's pray together. Let's pray together.

And that you show us, Lord, a better way. That you give us eternal life and healing and wholeness in our hearts. That you change who we are from being cheats and liars into being those who rely upon you and upon your grace and grow into the likeness of Christ, our creator.

Lord, we pray for each other that you would help us all to do that today. That none of us would be stuck or be left at a loss, but that we would all find peace and a home in you.

[35 : 21] Lord, we pray for our world and people in our lives who don't know you, but are stuck and are hurting or have hurt others. Lord, we pray that you would be their lasting solution, that you would meet them as you have met us in our sin, so you'd meet them in their sin and lead them to yourself and to life everlasting.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.