

Our World

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Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 00] So here's a British actor and presenter of the TV quiz show *QI*, which many of you I'm sure will watch, Stephen Fry, speaking about why he doesn't believe in the God of the Bible.

He says this, I wonder if this is where you're at today. He said, in an interview with an Irish TV channel, why should I respect a capricious, mean-minded, stupid God who creates a world which is so full of injustice and pain?

Now that is a philosophically valid and an emotionally honest question. And it's one we're going to be thinking about today as we get into this chapter of the Bible. Now this chapter, if you scan your eyes over it, it is 31 verses long.

But I guarantee that every single one of us within two verses of reading this together are going to have the same question in mind. And it's this. What on earth is something like this doing in the Bible?

Because this is a horrendous story of the rape of a young woman. And flowing from that, the harrowing account of revenge and bloodshed.

[1 : 13] Now if the British Board of Film Classification were tasked with rating this, they would, without shadow of a doubt, go for 18 plus. So here's the question I've been asking myself for the last number of weeks knowing that this is coming.

And asking myself as I've been prepping this series in Genesis. Why don't we just skip it? Now two reasons why we go towards this.

And here's number one. It's a conviction. It's a conviction that all scripture is God breathed. Right? We are a church that loves its 316s. We love John 316.

How God desires all people to be saved. We love 1 Timothy, sorry 2 Timothy 316. That all scripture is God breathed.

We're a church who loves its 316s. Meaning that with chapter 34, it's not like the Bible translators dropped the ball with this one. No, every single verse in the Bible is there because God wanted it there.

[2 : 17] The first one is a conviction. The second one is an experience. Having done this, worked in this church for 11 years, here's what I know to be true. That so often God does the deepest work in our hearts when we go to what we wrestle with the hardest parts of his word.

Now some of us will read this as it were and we will read this from the armchair. Right? We will be thinking exactly what Stephen Fry was saying. And if that's you here today, if you're wondering, and surely this just proves the invalidity of the Christian faith, then here's the question I want to ask you to think about as we read this together in just a few minutes time.

Do you recognize the world of Genesis 34? And the answer is, it's our world. Right?

It's our world where it was discovered this week that Andrew Tate's been running a WhatsApp group aimed at grooming women. It's our world where as of this week I now find myself in a street WhatsApp group because one of our neighbors just up the road was broken into and everyone was kind of rallying together to see if we could get some CCTV of what footage of what actually went on. This is our world. This is our world. But here's where Christians respectfully disagree. And I'll just put it up there again with the comments of Stephen Fry. Yes, God created the world.

[3 : 49] But Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 tell us that God created a perfect world. In fact, it's only as Adam and Eve defy their creator, something that human beings have done ever since, that from Genesis 3 onward as sin enters and spoils God's perfect world, that we begin to get words in the human story.

We begin to get words like shame and we begin to get words like death and we begin to get words like murder. And the thing is to see that those words were not on the scene in Genesis 1 and

Genesis 2.

Here is life as we know it. And this is a Bible phrase that people use worth thinking about. Here is life as we know it, east of Eden. East in the Bible is symbolic of just moving away from God.

So in our passage today, if you come with me to chapter 34, right, we meet this young girl called Dina. And we are quickly introduced to the man who violated her at verse 2.

His name is Shechem. Now notice what we're told about him. We are told, do you notice, and none of this is wasted, that he's a young prince of the land.

[5 : 05] Now what we have to understand is that in this guy's world, might is right. He gets what he wants. And what he wants in this moment is that he thinks he has a right to Dina's body.

Hear it in his verse at verse 4, right? What does he say? Dad, and hear him speak. Get me this girl to be my wife. And this is par for the course in Canaan.

We've got to understand that this crime is not making the headlines on the Canaan 6 o'clock news. As far as Canaan is concerned, this is nothing.

But here is the God of perfect justice saying about this young woman, this human being who he made wonderfully in his image.

Here is he here declaring that I see you. And I see what happened. And it's worth parking that thought for where we're going to end this morning.

[6 : 11] God is declaring here that I see you. Nothing escapes the attention of the three times holy, all-seeing God.

Others of us will be reading this, not so much from the armchair, but I am so aware we will be heartbreakingly reading this from the hospital bed.

Sexual crime, revenge, this is a raw part of your life story. And hear me say that I am so deeply sorry that that's been your experience.

And I desperately want you to hold on and see the tender heart of Jesus for you. So what on earth is something that they're doing in the Bible?

Well, here's the key, I think, that unlocks the purpose of this chapter. Okay? See in chapter 34 who isn't mentioned.

[7 : 20] Scan your eye over it. Who is not mentioned in this chapter? God's not mentioned in this chapter. Yeah? Not once in 31 verses.

As if the writer is saying, here is what the anti-God, we will do what we think is right, human heart is capable of.

And also see who is mentioned in this chapter. And there's a lot of people mentioned, but the camera zones in on one, is Jacob. And as we'll see as we read this through now, this man called Jacob is pathetically passive.

See if, here's the challenge as we read it through. See if you can spot the ways that Jacob so terribly fails in this chapter. Come and read this with me and let's see and hear from our God this morning.

Verse one. Now Dina, the daughter Leah had born to Jacob, went out to visit the woman of the land. When Shechem, son of Hamor, the Hivite, the ruler of that area, saw her, he took her and raped her.

[8 : 32] His heart was drawn to Dina, daughter of Jacob. He loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. And Shechem said to his father, Hamor, get me this girl as my wife.

When Jacob heard that his daughter Dina had been defiled, his sons were in the fields with his livestock. So he did nothing about it until they came home. Then Shechem's father, Hamor, went out to talk with Jacob.

Meanwhile, Jacob's sons had come in from the fields as soon as they'd heard what had happened. They were shocked and furious because Shechem had done an outrageous thing in Israel by sleeping with Jacob's daughter, a thing that should not be done.

But Hamor said to them, my son Shechem has his heart set on your daughter. Please give her to him as his wife. Intermarry with us, give us your daughters and take our daughters for yourselves. You can settle among us. The land is open to you. Live in it, trade in it and acquire property in it. Then Shechem said to Dina's father and brothers, let me find favor in your eyes and I will give you whatever you ask.

[9 : 42] Make the price for the bride and the gift I am to bring as great as you like and I'll pay whatever you ask me. Only give me the young woman as my wife. Because their sister Dina had

been defiled, Jacob's sons replied deceitfully as they spoke to Shechem and his father Hamor.

They said to them, we can't do such a thing. We can't give our sister to a man who's not circumcised. That would be a disgrace to us. We will enter into an agreement with you on one condition only, that you become like us by circumcising all your males.

Then we will give you our daughters and take your daughters for ourselves. We'll settle among you and become one people with you. But if you will not agree to be circumcised, we'll take our sister and go.

Their proposal seemed good to Hamor and his son Shechem. The young man who was the most honoured of all his father's family lost no time in doing what they said because he was delighted with Jacob's daughter.

So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the gate of their city to speak to the men of their city.

These men are friendly toward us, they said. Let them live in our land and trade in it.

[10:59] The land is plenty of room for them. We can marry their daughters and they can marry ours. But the men will agree to live with us as one people only in the condition that our males be circumcised as they themselves are.

Won't their livestock, their property and all their other animals become ours? So let us agree to their terms and they will settle among us. All the men who went out of the city gate agreed with Hamor and his son Shechem and every male in the city was circumcised.

Three days later, while all of them were still in pain, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dina's brothers, took their swords and attacked the unsuspecting city, killing every male.

They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword and took Dina from Shechem's house and left.

The sons of Jacob came upon the dead bodies and looted the city where their sister had been defiled.

They seized their flocks and herds and donkeys and everything else of theirs in the city and out in the fields. They carried off all their wealth and all their women and children, taking as plunder everything in their houses.

[12:14] Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, you've brought trouble on me by making me obnoxious to the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the people living in this land. We are few in number and if they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed.

But they replied, should he have treated our sister like a prostitute? Now friends, we're going to rattle through four ways that Jacob fails here.

Here's the first of these. Did you notice his lack of love for his daughter? Now, when Dina, daughter of Leah, was introduced to us, back at verse 21 of chapter 30, you get the sense that she is simply an inconvenient footnote in Jacob's life.

Right, what is she doing at verse one? She is innocently wandering the streets of this strange new place where the family have found themselves called Canaan and she's trying to see, you see it at verse one, the woman of the land.

Now, this is kind of like my girl Chloe getting on the 37 bus outside our house and making her way into town on Saturday night because all her friends are talking about how much fun there is to be had and she wants to see what all the fuss is about and all the time I'm sitting there in the armchair watching her go, not caring.

[13:44] So rather than nurturing and protecting her and raising her to know, love and serve the Lord who has protected him and led him so graciously, Jacob lets Dina just walk straight out into danger.

At best he didn't know, at worst he didn't care. He horrendously fails to protect his daughter in this situation.

Here's the second one. It's his lack of response to the tragedy. See verse five. He hears about what's happened and rather than weeping and mourning, which is fully what we would expect him to do, what does he do?

He holds his peace. Which you've got to say is really strange, is it not? In fact, it's Hamor, the father of Shechem, who comes toward Jacob and initiates the dialogue here.

And the author seems to be shocked that this is Jacob's response. I think that's why we're told that his sons get angry. I think it's why we're told that such a thing should not be done in Israel.

[14:55] The author's trying to tell us, Jacob, what are you doing? The third way he fails is his lack of leadership in the aftermath.

Not only does he entertain the speech from Hamor from verse eight about intermarrying, a thing that God has told his people not to do, the heart behind that being that because if you intertwine your lives with theirs, worshiping the gods of the Canaanites, you will gradually drift to just becoming just like them.

And I think that's one of the big lessons for the original readers here. Jacob lets his son hatch this deceitful plan to do them over. In fact, do you notice how they weaponize the one thing that God has said was physically meant to show that they were God's people set apart for him, distinct, loved, chosen.

What do they manipulate? Circumcision. And this only goes to show just how far from the Lord they have wandered in their own hearts.

And I think that's the tragedy here. This is God's people who are in the frame here. Now, if there's anyone who knows the catastrophic effects of lying and deceit and how it will always come back to haunt you, it's Jacob.

[16:26] And yet, do you see how he, as a father, he fails to say absolutely anything to firstly his daughter and then secondly his sons.

Fourth way he fails is in his lack of rebuke for the revenge. Right? So Simeon and Levi, notice that those guys are named there. They are Dina's brothers.

Leah's their mother. They are set in revenge. And I think verses 25 to 29 are written to show us that what they do, and did you pick this up as we read it through, what they do goes so far beyond what we might possibly understand as being justice.

They just go so over the top in terms of what they do. And I think this is maybe just understanding the Bible story, that God had enshrined in Israelite society this law, that it was an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

Now, I'd imagine most people in our world, because we use that phrase, have heard of that concept. And I remember for years thinking to myself, well, surely that just encourages things like this. Does that not encourage you to take matters into your own hands?

[17:42] And then I suddenly read it in the context. And it's written to ensure that justice is done in the society, particularly for the oppressed who cannot get justice on their own.

But more than that, as well as that, it caps it. As if to say, justice will be done, but it will be done on equal terms.

And it means that vendettas like this that go so far above the thing that's being capped just should not happen in Israelite society. But rather than scolding his sons for their utter wrong, do you see how Jacob is thinking primarily about the impact that this is going to have on them?

Did you pick that up as we read it through? Notice the repetition there at the end of the word I or me. Do you see it? You've brought trouble on me.

You've made me stink in the sight of my neighbours. You're going to bring trouble on my family. I'm worried that they will attack me. It's me. Me, me, me.

[18:46] All the way through here. Who's he thinking about all the way through? He's thinking about himself. And you bring those four things all together and do you see how in this account Jacob is pathetically passive?

Now you think back to what we learned last week as we were in chapter 33 and you've got to see I kind of skipped out of here last week thinking this is really good. In the context of Genesis maybe you were optimistically thinking that maybe Jacob is the saviour that God said he'd send to save us to save his people from their east of Eden lives.

The promised serpent crusher of Genesis 3 maybe it's Jacob. Well that dream collapses like a house of cards in this chapter. But more than that who is Jacob in this chapter in actual fact like? I've never seen this before until studying it this week. Who does he remind you of? He's not the serpent crusher is he? No we see we see him failing to care as a father and I think this really should be a lesson to us dads in here.

We see him sitting silently in the background failing to lead. presumably he's an earshot of all these conversations. We see him blaming others failing to take responsibility.

[20:10] We can almost hear him say at the end there our God is these sons who you've given me who are the problem. Who does he remind you of? He's just like Adam.

Isn't he? He is just like Adam. He is not the serpent crusher and so you've got to ask yourselves let's come back to this question what on earth is something like this doing in the Bible?

As we see this man who fails in so many ways and who is pathetically passive I take it partly that one of the reasons is that we would read this and it would make us long for someone to come from Jacob's line who would save us by being everything that Jacob and every single character in this is not.

If Jacob is pathetically passive dear friends we have to see that our longing here is that someone would come who is so attractively active to save us and step into that Genesis longing comes Jesus.

Now contrast him with every single character in this chapter as it were every male in this chapter contrast Shechem the prince of the land who abused his position to get what he wanted contrast him with Jesus and how is he described?

[21 : 45] What kind of prince is he? He is the prince of peace who stepped into our east of Eden world and who used his power not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Contrast Levi and Simeon here brimming with anger and rage going to do whatever it takes to see that justice is done and more contrast them with Jesus who both said and personified a love for your enemies and contrast Jacob who failed his daughter in so many ways at this point contrast him with Jesus who came to win for himself and make sons and daughters of the living God.

Now can I just take you to one place as we begin to wrap this up that I love seeing Jesus in action and if you've got a Bible turn with me here and you will see him in all his beauty.

Here he is in Mark chapter 5. Oh this is one of my favorite stories in the Bible because you see both the compassion and the power of Jesus on full display.

the context of the story Mark chapter 5 as you're turning there this man called Jairus has desperately summoned Jesus to come and heal his dying 12 year old daughter.

[23 : 23] And as Jesus is on the way there out of nowhere into this scene comes this woman and we're given details about this woman right?

she's been bleeding for 12 years. She's been to doctor after doctor trying to get better and in this day we need to understand that you'd get as many good ones as you would bad ones because witch doctors and the likes are prevalent in that day who make a living from fleecing people.

Perhaps that's evidence in the third fact that we're given about her that she's spent all that she has trying to get better all that she has but she's only gotten worse.

So step into Jesus' world this woman who may well have been taken advantage of who would certainly be accustomed to humiliation and because of her condition she would certainly know what it is to be an outcast.

Here is a woman on the canvas of life and in desperation she reaches out and touches Jesus' robe and I love that. I love her desperation but I love what Jesus does.

[24 : 36] What does Jesus do? He doesn't just walk on by. He stops as if to say I see you. I see you.

I know. And recognizing her faith he calls her and I've always thought this was really strange he calls her daughter. Always thought that was really weird as I read it through but what if and this has recurred to me recently what if Mark has intertwined these two accounts of people one a 12 year old daughter one a woman who's been suffering for 12 years and he's intertwined these accounts to make to us the point that just how Jairus feels about his daughter how much more then and in the same way does Jesus feel and now relates to this woman as daughter you know Sam Albury I heard him recently talk about becoming a Christian he said he came to Christianity for the forgiveness but he stayed in Christianity for Jesus and this account of him here it is wonderful and what makes this more than nice words what makes this better than sentiments is that Jesus goes to the cross to win this woman for himself see the cross is the only place we can go to make sense of what is happening here with Dina it is the place where the justice and the grace of God meet at their apex you see the cross of Jesus says to you and it says to Dina that what happened to you is not trivial that what happened to you is serious so serious in fact that it required the suffering and death of the son of God to pay for it we look at the cross and it doesn't undermine injustice it underscores it hear Jesus say from the cross that I know what it is to be humiliated

I know what it is to be wronged and hear Jesus say right at the end of the Bible story that one day he will return to make all wrongs right and his heart right now in heaven for his people his heart right now for you whoever you are here today whatever has happened to you is exactly the same as it is as we see here and you know knowledge of that day that he will return to make all wrongs right

knowledge of it means that we can leave justice to God it is only the grace of Jesus seen perfectly at the cross that makes the long long road of forgiveness and change a possibility and I've seen it in my own life when people forgive and I think wow it is only possible when Jesus takes out the heart that longs for revenge and blood and puts in it a knowledge of who he is and what he's done for us on the cross to quote

Tim Keller a God who substitutes himself for you and suffers so that you might go free is a God that you can fully trust so what on earth is something like this doing in the Bible friends can I just leave us with two quick words of response I think we need to make here's the first and it's just simply the word tears I think what goes on here should break our hearts because we see injustice so often in our world don't we that our hearts can so often become numb to the plight of everyday human beings do we care about and are we willing to be a safe place where we walk with and welcome people in our city people in our lives who know this pain do you know it was the church's response to the great plagues of the second century as people were suffering left right and centre when everyone else was legging it out of the cities but the

Christians stayed behind the historians reckon is the reason behind the explosive growth of Christianity in the second century as people looked on Christians and thought they really care you know we want to be a church family and maybe taking another angle on this where we treat and view particular members of the opposite sex radically differently you know three of the world's top 12 most visited websites in 2019 were porn sites the biggest site in the UK has an average of 42 billion visits per year which works itself out is 1200 clicks every second maybe particularly speaking to the guys in the room although I recognise that this is an issue for girls as well guys if you're in those zones right now if you've found yourself in those circles you need to do everything that you can to get out we want to create a safe space where we can be honest with one another about our struggles and if this is you today you have to see that Jesus has saved you out of that everything that you are doing every view every click is funding a institution that is taking advantage of some of the most violated people in our society not to mention the fact that simply it's just not the way that we should be viewing women particularly our sisters in

[30 : 43] Christ can I just say as well not just to go on the defence but to go on the offence guys we should be the biggest supporters of the flourishing of women's ministry in this church so here's what we're going to do if you're up for this on Wednesday night when our sisters meet we are going to meet on zoom just for half an hour to eight and half eight just to pray for them because we want them to know that we love them and we see them and we value everything that they bring to our church family another angle in this friends do we see anger and bitterness in our hearts do you see that longing for revenge now it might not express itself to the extent that it does here but how often is it the case that we can destroy people with our words we can destroy people with posts we can destroy people with texts and this calls us to be a people who are different with our words and how we treat other human beings so that's the first word tears dear friends let's do some soul searching off the back of this and I couldn't be creative enough to come up with another word so we're just going to go for fears tears and fears this should move us really simply as we close to fear God more fear the Lord come back to him have your eyes on him the place just like that woman that says my only hope is you Lord Jesus you know just as we closed you know the earliest Christians had this saying that they always said and it was just the word

Maranatha Maranatha is just taken from one of the very last words of the Bible in response to what Jesus said Jesus says there right at the end he says behold I'm coming soon it's the very last taste that we get in the Bible of what he says before he comes that longing that should be inside his people's hearts Lord Jesus come and make it new so what Maranatha means is just simply come Lord Jesus come and make it right come and put perfect justice on full display and one day he will and I take it in the words of the Narnians that this will be true and I love the way that C.S. Lewis captures this wrong will be right when Aslan comes in sight and the sound of his roar sorrows will be no more when he bears his teeth winter meets its death and when he shakes his mane we shall have spring again and so it's to him that we look we're saying in just a moment I want to pray but particularly if there's something this morning that you want to chat about or pray about and we've covered so much stuff here today but we want to create a church culture where we are serious about carrying one another's burdens and so if that's you here today any of the elders Keita anyone else who's been up front here today it would be our joy to pray and chat to you if there's not something you want to do this morning our email addresses are all on the website you

can contact us through that but friends let's feel the weight of the challenge and I hope the height of the comfort that's come to us as we've heard God speak to us today in his word let's pray the words that Jesus said there in Mark chapter 5 daughter rise your faith has made you well oh Lord thank you that there is none that compares with Jesus thank you that we do not need to second guess what you are like but thank you that you have spoken to us in your words thank you that we see you on full display your heart your purposes as we gaze at Jesus and so father I'm so conscious that I have no idea where this lands today but father thank you that your spirit is a way better pastor than I will ever be and so Lord I pray that as he works through your words that's gone forth this morning that he would be bringing comfort assurance tenderness challenge and words of rebuke father may we be a community that shines the light of Jesus even more brightly in our world father we thank you for your goodness and we just pray all of these things knowing that you hear us because we pray in Jesus's worthy name amen blessings for future you