

# The Villain Returns

*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: 26 April 2020

Preacher: Nick Louw

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, good morning. Have you ever watched a series, a TV series, where it gets to the very last episode, say, of the series and everything's wrapping up, that's been building up for the whole season and there's some climactic scene that ends it all and the good guy is vindicated and the bad guy gets what's coming to them, gets caught or whatever.

And you're feeling really good about it and it fades to black. Everything's completed. And that is where it should end. But it doesn't because there's another scene just after that one, just before the whole season concludes, which shows you something you didn't expect.

Some bad guy re-emerges or some new crisis starts and then it ends. Obviously, because it wants you to wait for the next season and watch that when it comes. And it's very frustrating.

And it's frustrating because we all want a happy ending, don't we? We watch these things. We watch movies. We read stories because we want a happy ending. We want to feel all warm and fuzzy inside and good.

But, of course, that's not how TV series sell their upcoming seasons. But also, if you think about it, that's not how life works. And there are often not happy endings in this life, in this age.

[ 1 : 1 7 ] And it's certainly not the case in Jacob's story as we turn now to Genesis. We've been following Jacob's story over the past few weeks. And last Sunday, if you were with us, you'll remember it seemed to end and close off and wrap up pretty well.

Jacob got a new identity after his climactic encounter with God on the banks of the Jabbok. He made peace with Esau very unexpectedly, his brother, and that whole tension was resolved.

He then settled in the land, bringing to a conclusion his whole series of journeys. And it fades to black. And we think that's a great ending for Jacob's story.

Except there's another scene where a villain re-emerges to cause a whole new world of trouble. And it turns out that villain is Jacob himself.

Even though he's received this new identity from God, as we saw last week, it seems the old Jacob is not yet gone, as we thought he was.

[ 2 : 2 0 ] He's still very much alive and kicking. And so in the next two chapters, basically, we encounter a whole bunch of unexpectedly nasty things happening.

Amongst which is rape, injustice, deception, revenge, murder, incest, and quite a lot of death.

It's not what we expected for the closing off of the Jacob story. And what's more, all of these nasty things, these series of things that happen in the next couple of chapters, 34, 35, can be traced back to a decision Jacob made right at the beginning of the story.

In fact, it's at the end, right at the end of the previous chapter, chapter 33. Something that's very easy to miss. We read it last week and as we were reading through 33. But I just want us to look at it again, because it's quite important to understand, if we're going to understand why all these horrible things are happening.

It's in 33, verse 18. After Jacob came from Paddan Aram, he arrived safely in the city of Shechem in Canaan, and camped with insight of the city.

[ 3 : 37 ] Okay, so what's so bad about that? He finds a nice place to pitch his tents. There's nothing wrong with that, is there? Well, there is, if you know the story, and if you remember two important things that we've seen in Genesis so far.

The first thing we need to remember is that Jacob had vowed, right at the beginning of his journey, chapters ago, he had vowed to God to return to a place called Bethel, the place that God first met with him.

And he vowed that him and his family were going to serve God and worship him there. And so by not actually arriving there, there's a bigger mission. By settling outside the pagan city of Shechem, making his home there, he hasn't actually completed that very important vow he made to God.

But secondly, him camping outside that pagan city reminds us of something that happened way back in chapter 13 in Genesis. Do you remember what it was?

Abraham and Lot. Remember when they split up? Lot went, we're told, and camped outside the city of Sodom. He was attracted to the trappings of urban life.

[ 4 : 46 ] And that caused a whole lot of trouble for him, of course, as we read later. And so that indicates the reluctance to separate himself from the draw and the attraction of the world around him.

And we're reminded of Lot when we read about Jacob. And so it seems that Jacob is being, just like Lot, being drawn to the benefits of city living, enough that he puts aside his original dedication to God.

And it's very Jacob. Because Jacob, we've learned, is a man who's very much interested in what he can get out of any situation he's in. And living near the city and being able to use the amenities of the city and have business with the city is a very attractive prospect.

But we already see, because of this vow, because of Jacob's family history, it's probably not a good idea. And we see that as the story continues.

Because his family, of course, naturally start to get involved in the life of the city. As the first verse in chapter 34 shows us, it says, Now Dinah, the daughter of Leah, sorry, the daughter Leah had born to Jacob, went out to visit the woman of the land.

[ 6 : 01 ] Now, what does that mean? Well, in more contemporary language, she went out for a night on the town with the girls. And that also helps to explain the situation that verse 2 describes.

When Shechem, son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of that area, saw her. So this is obviously, you know, this fancy prince. He's also out clubbing at the same time as Dinah.

He saw her, he took her, and he raped her. Which, of course, is a despicable thing. We know all too well what a scourge in our modern society violence against women is.

And it's the place of men. It's the place of men to stand up and fight against violence against women. To use their strength, not against women, but to protect them. It's one of our responsibilities as men.

But it's always been a problem. This fallen, disgusting, sinful violence against the weak from the strong. And it's, as I said, it's the responsibility of men, the strong, to stand up and protect the weaker.

[ 7 : 09 ] Which is why what happens next is so bad. Jacob doesn't do that. He's her father. But he seems to want to sweep the whole affair under the carpet.

In fact, he and Hamor, who's the father of the rapist, get together. These two old men wanting to get together and just smooth things over and negotiate a marriage.

So that they don't rock the boat. They don't upset these delicate business relationships they have between Jacob and the men of the city. And so it ends up that Dinah gets no justice.

But the story continues. And it has a kind of a snowball effect. One injustice leads to another. Jacob's failure to seek justice leads to his sons stepping in to get some justice of their own.

And so they tricked the men of Shechem into getting circumcised if they want to marry their women. But it turns out that was only to make them vulnerable to a surprise attack.

[ 8 : 09 ] As we read from verse 25. Have a look in your Bibles. Three days later, while all of them were still in pain, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah'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 Dinah 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 the houses.

Okay, so you see what's happened here? Jacob's lack of action, his passivity, his failure to seek justice has led in turn to his son's overreaction.

Yes, they get revenge on their sister's rapist and the kind of desire for justice in all of us is very satisfied at that point, but they don't stop there.

[ 9 : 19 ] They also kill all the men of the city, even the ones who had nothing to do with the crime. They plunder the city and they take the women and children as slaves, which is really no better than the original crime.

Do you see what happens when wickedness is not dealt with in our world? When justice is not done properly, it just ends up leading to more injustice and more wickedness, typically.

And vigilantism. You know, when sin is swept under the carpet for the sake of peace, there is never a good outcome. And so it's really difficult to know who to side with in this story.

You know, that's a tendency we all have, isn't it? We all want to side with someone. We all want a hero to read about, someone to model after. We want to know who the good guys and the bad guys are.

But then we read the Bible and we realize that's not how the Bible is written. And these stories that we read aren't actually here to teach us about people and give us examples to follow, as this story makes very obvious.

[ 10 : 21 ] Apart, I mean, from maybe, if it's going to teach us anything about people, these stories tell us just how much depravity lies under the surface of all of us. That sin exists in us all and how ugly it can get when it comes out.

But other than that, you know, this story is not about these people primarily. It's not about these men. These stories are actually here to teach us about God, which seems strange in this story because God isn't even featured.

God's not mentioned in chapter 34. He's not present. And the situation just goes from bad to worse for Jacob and his family because now they've made an enemy of the pagan people that they're living with.

The surrounding towns, if they try to move, they're going to be pursued and cut down. They've made some real bad enemies here. All the powerful people of the land.

But still, they spare no thought for God. They don't think of getting on their knees and praying like Jacob had done in the past in difficult situations. There's none of that here. And so you'd expect God will just honor that and leave them alone and leave them to the consequences of their actions.

[ 11 : 35 ] But that's the surprising thing in the story. He doesn't do that. It's right then in the middle of the crisis that God shows up out of the blue and he rescues them.

By first reminding Jacob of where he's meant to be. In 35 verse 1, look what he says. Get up. Go to Bethel.

And make an altar there to me. Jacob, do what you were supposed to do. That's what you need. Even if you don't realize it. And then, after telling Jacob where he should have been all along, he then miraculously helps him and his family to get there.

Have a look from verse 5 of chapter 35. Then they set out and the terror of God fell on the towns all around them so that no one pursued them.

Jacob and all the people with him came to Luz, that is Bethel, in the land of Canaan. There he built an altar and he called the place El Bethel. Because it was there that God had revealed himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother.

[ 12 : 47 ] Now we're going, he didn't deserve that. He didn't deserve God to intervene and rescue him after all his failures. He deserved no help from God. He should have got what was coming to him and his sons as well, right?

Isn't that what you're feeling at this point in the story? And that's why the Bible is often so frustrating to read. The Bible is frustrating to read because the Bible is all about God saving people who don't deserve it.

God saving despicable people. And that's also what the story and others like it are here to teach us about God. A very important lesson about God that we need to know this morning.

And that is that God comes through for his people despite themselves. That he doesn't give up on them no matter how much they fail.

That is the God of the Bible that is revealed in these stories. Because there's no doubt Jacob failed and did wrong. And his sons who end up being saved too also did terrible wrongs.

[ 13 : 51 ] But there's also no doubt that you and I have failed God and done wrong. And not lived as we should live even after becoming Christians.

And not dedicated ourselves fully to God like we vowed to do when we first became Christians. Remember? So let's not pretend we're much better than Jacob. Because we all know our hearts, don't we?

We all know the depths of our hearts and the depravity we're capable of that no one else knows about. Well, God knows about the depths of your heart and mine.

And so why should God save any of us? Why does he save people who don't deserve it? Why did he save Jacob here? Well, he did it for one reason. And one reason only.

Not because of who Jacob was at all. But because Jacob was in God's covenant. And that alone is the reason he was saved.

[ 14 : 51 ] It had nothing to do with who he was. Which this story makes abundantly clear. Right at the end of Jacob's whole story. This whole big section in Genesis covering Jacob's story.

We've got this reminder right at the end. When we see the old Jacob resurface. That actually God's salvation of him never had anything to do with who he was. And it reminds us that God's salvation is never about us.

The people he saves. It's all about God. And only about God and his promises to save those who come to him. And that's all. And his faithfulness to those promises. That's what the story of the Bible is about.

Not what we've done to earn that salvation. It's not about our goodness. Or even our ability to respond to God or understand God. It's all about God. These stories are all about God.

It's about him and the salvation that he has made freely available to even the worst of sinners. And if we know ourselves truly. That should be an encouragement.

[ 15 : 58 ] It's why the Bible says. While we were still sinners. Christ died for us. Not after we had pulled ourselves together Christ died for us.

Not after we had learned the error of our ways and done something about it Christ died for us. No. While we were still sinners. While we were still helpless. Uninterested in salvation.

Undeserving and unable to do anything. It's then. That Christ. Died for us. It's why the Apostle Paul says.

Here is a trustworthy saying. That deserves full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world. To save. Sinners. Of whom I am the worst.

You know Paul. Had a realistic view of himself. He knew. The depravity that was under the hood of his life. You know being a. Being a. A Jew.

[ 16 : 56 ] And a very devout Jew. And being. Daily in touch with God's Torah. His law. He understood. How unable he was. To fulfill.

God's requirements. And that's. That's all that the law. Does. It only shows. More and more. The. The depths. Of our sin. So Paul had a realistic. View.

Of his own depravity. Just like. Jacob needed to have about his. And we need to have about ours. And that's why we need stories like this. In our Bible. Because they show us.

Just what. Extent. Of wicked people. God is still. Dedicated. To coming through for. And saving. Despite themselves. For no.

Reason. Other than. They're under his covenant protection. And he's promised to save the people in his covenant. No matter what. Which really means. The most important question.

[ 17 : 53 ] You can ever be asked. If you're a sinner. If you've. Broken God's laws. If you've gone against God. And I think we all know. If we're honest with ourselves. That we have done that.

That we've gone against our creator. The most important question. You can be asked. Is. Are you under his covenant protection or not? And it's a vital question.

Especially in a world of death. You know. The coronavirus. It's just the latest reminder. Of our cursed state. And the shortness and fragility of our lives.

But. You know. Whether it's a virus. Or something else that gets you. Something will. You know. The Bible says. It's appointed for man to die once.

And after that comes judgment. It's appointed for us. To die. It's in the calendar already. The appointment is set. As inevitable.

[ 18 : 48 ] As that is the appointment of judgment. Where we stand before our creator. The creator who gave us. Life. And so where. Is your hope. Pinned in the face of that reality.

Is. Is your hope pinned on your own. Assumed goodness. Is that. Is that really good enough. If you. Know the depth of your heart. If you're realistic with yourself. Do you really think you'll make the cut of a perfect God.

Or is your hope maybe pinned on. Religion. Some religious works and. Habits that you keep. Is that really going to save you though. Is a few religious works in your life.

Going to really make up for the countless times. You've ignored. God. And broken his laws. Well. This story. Which highlights the human. The reality of human depravity.

Also shows us. That as sinners. Our hope can't possibly be on those things. Our only hope for salvation. Is to be under God's covenant protection. And Jesus.

[ 19 : 50 ] That is why Jesus came to the world. That is why the climactic story of the Bible. Is Jesus coming to this world. Because the reason he came. Here was to make it possible for you and me. And anyone.

No matter what their. Creed or nation. Or nationality. Or background. Made it possible for anyone. To come into God's. Saving covenant. That Genesis teaches us about.

And he made it possible for you to do that. When he died on the cross for sins. And it's what the last supper was all about. Remember. The night before. Jesus died.

He met with his disciples. And instituted this very significant sign. Of the last supper. And when he shared the wine. Which represented his blood.

He said. This is my blood of the covenant. This is the way. That you can be under God's covenant protection. Take it. Take it inside yourselves. Because that is. Is you being part of the covenant.

[ 20 : 46 ] And that is the only hope that you have for salvation. So if you haven't. Yet come under God's covenant protection. Or you don't know. Whether you're under God's covenant protection. Or not. You need.

To come and put your faith. In that body and blood. That Jesus gave. To save you from your sins. And you need to be baptized. Into the covenant. If you're going to have any hope of salvation. In the face of death.

But what if you already have done that? What if you are a member of God's covenant? Well then. Before we finish. I want you to see in this story. One more thing.

I want you to see the one thing. Jacob did right. From the moment. God showed up. And showed that he was still dedicated. To his promise. To Jacob. You know what Jacob did?

He responded. By truly dedicating himself to God. Have a look from. Verse 2 of chapter 35. So Jacob said to his household.

[ 21 : 41 ] And to all who were with him. Get rid of the foreign gods. You have with you. And purify yourselves. And change your clothes. Then come. Let us go up to Bethel.

Where I will build an altar to God. Who answered me in the day of my distress. And who has been with me wherever I have gone. So Jacob here is. He's reflecting on God's.

Unflinching faithfulness to him. Despite his flaws. Despite his failures. And so in response to that faithfulness. He gets rid of the family idols.

The attachments to the pagan world. That was still existing in his life. And in his family's life. And the attachments to their past. The idols they took from their religions.

That they came from. He said get rid of them. We're going to be devoted now to God. And God alone. We're going to dedicate ourselves to him. Just as he's dedicated himself to us.

[ 22 : 38 ] And then what did he do? He went to Bethel. He left the bright lights of the city. And all that the city could give him. And he trekked to Bethel. So that he could finally fulfill his vow to God.

And worship him properly. Well that is also the call. For all of us. Who have come into God's covenant today. Through Jesus. Not to presume on the grace of God.

But to respond to God's dedication to save you. By now. Dedicating yourself to God. Truly. Cutting off from your life.

The trappings of the world. That are keeping you from him. Identifying and putting off the idols. That you still tend to love more than you love God. And you know what those things are.

And then. In the words of Jesus. Losing this world. And what it can give you. For Jesus and the gospel. So that you can properly dedicate yourself.

[ 23 : 39 ] To his service. And worship. For the rest of your life. Like Jacob finally learned to do. In this story. Well let us respond.

To that great reminder. Of God's faithfulness. To save his people. Despite themselves. Through the death of his son. Jesus Christ. Let us respond now. With the words that will appear.

On the screen. Almighty God. We thank you for feeding us. With the spiritual food. Of the most precious body. And blood. Of your son. Our savior.

Jesus Christ. And assuring us. Thereby. Of your favor. And goodness. Towards us. That we. Are very members. In his body.

The blessed company. Of all faithful people. And heirs. Through hope. Of your everlasting kingdom. By the merits. Of the most precious death.

[ 24 : 33 ] Of Jesus Christ. We humbly ask. Therefore. Help us. By your grace. That we may continue. In that holy fellowship. And do all such good works.

As you have prepared. For us to walk in. Through Jesus Christ. Our Lord. To whom. With you. And the Holy Spirit. Be all honor. And glory.

World without end. Amen.