

## Genesis (2011) 29C

- Poor Jacob
  - He seems to have met his match in Uncle Laban
    - Jacob is someone who schemes and manipulates others to get what he wants
    - He arrived in Haran to work for Laban thinking he was a man in control of his own destiny
      - Never mind God's appearance and His promise to take care of Jacob's needs
      - Jacob heard but didn't listen, so he's already forgotten God's promise
    - So as he seeks Rachel as his wife, he falls for Laban's trick and ends up marrying Leah, the undesirable older daughter
  - Jacob fooled himself into thinking he was in control of his own destiny
    - And that's Jacob's essential problem...a willingness to trust in flesh rather than rest in God's promises
    - Truly, Jacob is a poster child for every man since Adam, in that all men share his weakness to some degree
      - But Jacob is to be the father of a nation of God's people
      - He more than anyone else needs to be a man who understands and demonstrates dependence upon God
  - Laban is an ungodly man, living in his flesh and ignorant of the word of God
    - So who better for God to use to discipline Jacob?
    - Laban's schemes and tricks offer God the perfect antagonist to bring Jacob to the end of himself
      - To show Jacob the foolishness of depending on himself
      - To cause Jacob to turn to God recognizing God's authority, faithfulness and goodness

- Last week, Jacob had entered the marriage tent as a man in love and exited the tent a man in despair...and that isn't a commentary on marriage
  - He emerged to find himself married to the wrong woman, Leah

[Gen. 29:25](#) So it came about in the morning that, behold, it was Leah! And he said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served with you? Why then have you deceived me?"

[Gen. 29:26](#) But Laban said, "It is not the practice in our place to marry off the younger before the firstborn.

[Gen. 29:27](#) "Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also for the service which you shall serve with me for another seven years."

[Gen. 29:28](#) Jacob did so and completed her week, and he gave him his daughter Rachel as his wife.

[Gen. 29:29](#) Laban also gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maid.

[Gen. 29:30](#) So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and indeed he loved Rachel more than Leah, and he served with Laban for another seven years.

- Remember we mentioned last week that the marriage process in the ancient East was a week-long affair
  - The week began with the marriage day and marriage night
    - Jacob entered the tent on that first night
    - His bride was waiting in the dark tent, fully veiled
      - So Jacob was unable to detect Laban's deception until after the marriage was consummated
      - So Jacob emerged from the tent married, like it or not
  - To add insult to injury, the marriage still had another week of celebration, where the bride and groom were expected to celebrate their union with the guests
    - This would be the greatest celebration in their lives, and it was especially important for the woman
    - In this patriarchal culture, the woman was rarely celebrated or made the center of attention
      - So the marriage week was perhaps the biggest week of her life
  - Poor Leah

- She's unwanted and unloved by the man who was tricked into marrying her
- The scripture portrays Leah as smart enough to understand the situation with her new husband
  - She knows she was not wanted
  - Her marriage starts in the worst possible way
- And don't forget about Rachel
  - She expected to marry Jacob, only to discover on the wedding night that Laban was substituting his oldest daughter instead
  - Rachel couldn't warn Jacob or disobey her father
  - She could only stand by and feel jealousy for her sister
- Despite Laban's trickery, Leah is the woman God had intended for Jacob
  - We could compare this situation to the way Jacob obtained the birthright
    - We know Jacob was the man God had chosen to receive the birthright, for God said so even before the boys were born
    - Yet God allowed Jacob to obtain it through a sinful act of deception
      - God did need Jacob to take that step in order to bring about His plan in Jacob's life
      - He allowed it to happen so that through the consequences of Jacob's sin God could discipline and mature Jacob
  - Similarly, God selected Leah for Jacob, and God took advantage of Laban's sinful deception to accomplish His plan while disciplining Jacob
    - We'll see further evidence later that Leah was God's one and only choice of wife for Jacob
    - For now we need only note that Jacob wasn't willing to see God's hand in these circumstances

- Does this perspective of God working through the sin of men to accomplish His will challenge your understanding of who God is and how God works? If so, don't reject it out of hand
  - God can accomplish anything He desires without our help, but the story of scripture testifies that God chooses to work through sinful men because that's all He has
    - He saved humanity through the work of Noah, a man who sinfully became drunk after the flood
    - He delivered His promises to save a people and the world to Abraham, a man who sinfully lied about his wife twice and married a concubine
    - He chose kings who were sinners
    - He chose prophets who ran from their assignments and were convinced only after spending days in the belly of a fish
    - He chose apostles who fought over who would be the greatest then later abandoned His Son in His time of need
    - He chose you and I, men and women who sin everyday and yet somehow in His wisdom and mercy God is able to make something good come from it all
  - So the Lord has used Laban's sin to bring Jacob a wife that can both bless Jacob and humble him
- Rather than recognize God at work, Jacob remains prideful and determined to control his own destiny
  - So he demands an explanation from Laban for how he could trick Jacob in this way
    - Laban answers that it is not the custom of this land to marry the younger before the older
      - We can't be sure Laban is lying, but he probably is
      - Even if this was a custom in the land, why didn't Laban tell Jacob of this custom when they entered into the deal?
      - Jacob clearly stated he would work seven years for Rachel, not Leah

- Obviously, if Laban had told Jacob in the beginning that Jacob must marry Leah first, Jacob probably won't have agreed
        - At the very least, he would have negotiated further
- Laban's answer was simply a way for Laban to save face now that his deception has been revealed
  - This culture worked very hard to look righteous even when it was obvious to everyone that someone had done the wrong thing
  - As long as the offender offered a plausible explanation, everyone else played along with the face saving excuse because no one wanted to rob another man of his honor
- Having made excuse for his deception, Laban still knows what Jacob wants...he wants Rachel
  - And Laban still wants something himself
    - We remember that Laban's plan from the beginning has been to hold Jacob in his household as long as possible
    - Jacob is a valuable asset to Laban's sheep operation
    - Jacob knows shepherding and as a man blessed by the Lord, Jacob brings blessing everywhere he goes
  - So far Laban has kept Jacob close at hand for seven years, but now Jacob is angry and probably likely to leave town
    - But Laban has another card to play in his scheme
    - He offers Jacob the hand of Rachel for another seven years of labor
      - In reality, Jacob will have worked 14 years for Rachel, since he never intended to work for Leah
- Knowing Jacob isn't in a mood to trust his uncle, Laban makes the deal a little sweeter
  - He says he's willing to give Rachel to Jacob right now, but Jacob has to work an additional seven years
    - Jacob isn't going to turn this down, because he wants Rachel and thought he had her

- So Jacob agrees
  - Laban adds one other condition, probably out of pity for his oldest unloved daughter
    - Laban asks that Jacob complete the week for Leah first
    - The week refers to the week of marriage celebration that Leah expected
    - It would have been embarrassing for Leah to find her week cut short because Jacob marries her sister
      - Laban must have also realized that under these circumstances Leah would find herself in a loveless marriage
      - So He asks Jacob to at least have the common courtesy to give Leah her week before casting her aside for Rachel
- In v.28 we're told Jacob completes the week of celebration, and then immediately marries Rachel
  - This would have involved yet another week of celebration
    - Like Leah, Rachel receives a maid as a dowry gift
  - And then in v.30 our suspicions are confirmed
    - Jacob loves Rachel more than Leah
  - What a sad situation for Jacob and his two wives
    - God never endorses multiple marriages
    - The results of multiple marriages is always portrayed as a negative influence in the family and not something God desires
      - In fact later in the Law in Leviticus, marriages to sisters is specifically prohibited
    - Yet these marriages are considered legitimate and binding
      - The fact that they are not to God's liking and they bring negative consequences doesn't mean they aren't real
      - Every time these men make a marriage commitment, they are bound by that commitment, even though it brings negative consequences

- Consider the situation Jacob now finds himself
  - His first wife, the one God provided, has been cast aside to live out her life as a second class citizen in Jacob's household
  - Meanwhile, Jacob has moved on to the woman he wanted
    - How do you think these women are going to respond to each other?
    - Jacob's stubborn decision to seek after Rachel is going to bring lifelong struggle to this family
    - In fact, Jacob's favoritism for Rachel will be the root cause for intense jealousy in Jacob's family, leading to the most horrifying experience in Jacob's life
- And the troubles start virtually right away

[Gen. 29:31](#) Now the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, and He opened her womb, but Rachel was barren.

[Gen. 29:32](#) Leah conceived and bore a son and named him Reuben, for she said, "Because the LORD has seen my affliction; surely now my husband will love me."

[Gen. 29:33](#) Then she conceived again and bore a son and said, "Because the LORD has heard that I am unloved, He has therefore given me this son also." So she named him Simeon.

[Gen. 29:34](#) She conceived again and bore a son and said, "Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." Therefore he was named Levi.

[Gen. 29:35](#) And she conceived again and bore a son and said, "This time I will praise the LORD." Therefore she named him Judah. Then she stopped bearing.

- Notice right away, Moses tells us that the Lord is acting in these circumstances
  - The Lord gives Leah the opportunity to have children
    - But he left Rachel barren for the time being
    - Here again we see God expressing His preference for the woman Jacob should have as his wife
    - God leaves Rachel unable to have children but gives children to Leah
  - Moses tells us that this decision was a response to Jacob's lack of love for his first wife

- Being able to give your husband children was the highest possible blessing a woman received
  - The truth of this is reflected in Paul's teaching as he says:

[1Tim. 2:15](#) But women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.

- The word preserved is actually the word for saved, as in salvation
- Paul is saying that a woman's most important contribution to God's plan of salvation is to birth children who might one day become children of God
- Think of the magnitude of that statement
  - A woman carried in her body the unique and awesome power to bring a soul into existence
  - A person who may become a citizen of the eternal city, the New Jerusalem
  - One day that mother will walk the golden streets side by side with the believers she birthed
  - Both equals in God's plan, both eternally serving God, yet one gave physical life to the other
- Nothing a man does can compare with this privilege
- So when God gives Leah the privilege to bring forth the first children in Jacob's family, it was a clear statement from God about where His choice lies
  - Leah was the intended wife, yet she was the unloved one
  - Can Jacob not see the irony in this situation?
    - He was the unloved son, from the perspective of his father
    - Jacob was the one His father was determined to overlook, yet he was the one God chose
  - Now Jacob is committing the same sin upon his wife
    - He is rejecting the wife God chose so he can favor a woman of his own choosing



- Leah's first child was Reuben
  - The name Reuben in Hebrew means "see a son"
  - There are two things notable about this name
    - First, it's notable that Leah named the boy and not Jacob
      - Normally the patriarch would name the child, and the fact that he doesn't tells us how disengaged he was
      - Jacob doesn't seem to take any interest in Leah's child
    - The second thing is the name itself: Reuben
      - Leah names the child Reuben to make a point to Jacob
      - She says to Jacob, "See, I gave you a son"
  - Notice in v.32 Leah says surely now Jacob will love me
    - Giving a husband a son was very important, and Leah's first child – Jacob's first child – is a boy
    - So naturally Leah assumes this will bring Jacob around
    - But Jacob is so hard hearted, it has little effect
- Still, God shows more mercy on Leah and gives her a second son, whom she calls Simeon
  - The name means hearing, and Leah chooses this name to honor the Lord for hearing her sorrow at being unloved
  - This name is also important for two reasons
    - First, it tells us that Reuben didn't change Jacob's view of Leah
      - He remains in love with Rachel only and has no feelings for Leah
      - Poor Leah is still hated
    - Secondly, it tells us that Leah was God fearing, a believer as we say today
      - She is conscious of God's work in her life and credits God for receiving two sons

- Leah understands the truth, that the Lord is working to bring her husband back to her
- But Leah hasn't given up hope yet, so when she has a third son, she names him Levi
  - The name Levi means joined, because Leah is hopeful that a third son will finally be enough to join her to her husband
  - Interestingly, the Levites are the tribe who later join the nation of Israel to the Lord in His temple
    - So the name is prophetic in that it points to the role of the priesthood which comes from Levi
- Finally, Leah has a fourth son, Judah
  - The name means praise, as in praise the Lord
  - She is praising the Lord for having been given four sons in a row, which was quite an honor
    - So this provides further confirmation that the Lord has selected Leah for Jacob, but Jacob won't listen
  - But there is a deeper meaning here
- Look at the progression of Leah's names
  - First she assumes that a first-born son will be enough to win her husband over, so she names him Reuben
  - When Reuben fails to have that effect, she names the next son Simeon, because she knows the Lord is taking note of her situation
  - After she fails to win Jacob, she has a third son she names Levi, assuming a third time is the charm
- But now that all three sons have failed to impress Jacob, she seems to have given up hope of winning over her hard-hearted husband
  - The fourth son is a tribute to the Lord, praise to the Lord
    - Leah's husband is the Lord and she is praising Him for His faithfulness

- If you want further proof that the Lord intended Leah for Jacob, consider two of the sons she brings into the world
  - Levi is the tribe of priests
  - And Judah is the tribe of kings
- More importantly, Leah is in the line to the Messiah, the seed promise, while Rachel isn't
  - This isn't to say that Rachel isn't important to God's plan, but it does tell us that God would have been content with Leah as Jacob's wife
    - But Jacob wasn't content with God's plan
- What a stubborn man Jacob was
  - He is the man carrying God's promises yet he ignores God's obvious work in his life
    - While his new wife, coming from a pagan family who has yet to see or hear from the Lord, is the one responding to the Lord's grace
    - Before we shake our head at Jacob, ask whether we've done similar things
  - Who among us isn't as stubborn in our own way and to a similar degree
    - We carry God's promises too, made sure in the blood of Christ found in the New Covenant
    - We're called to see Him at work in our world and in our life, and follow Him
  - Yet how often do we repeat the sin of Jacob?
    - Do we chase after the shiny objects in our lives, the Rachels, while ignoring the Leahs God has given us
    - God is at work keeping His promises to give us food and clothing and a place to live, but maybe we're not content to accept what He provided
      - Maybe our house isn't big enough, or our neighborhood isn't nice enough

- Or our job or wardrobe or toys don't suit our desires
  - So we continue working to obtain the very thing God has already given us
- Like Jacob, who had a wife yet decided to work another seven years for another wife, he felt his needs went beyond God's provision
  - Think about that...how much work and effort in your life can be traced to trying to obtain something better than what God has already provided in the by and by?
  - Scripture isn't saying that it's necessarily wrong to have hopes and dreams and desires
  - But if those desires distract us from following God and serving Him, then yes they're wrong
- Jacob is clearly distracted, and this distraction is sowing seeds of discontent that won't bear fruit until many years later
  - Yet God will continue to work faithfully in this increasingly dysfunctional family because His faithfulness doesn't come and go like our faithfulness
  - Still, God finds ways to be faithful even as He allows the consequences of our sin to rest on our heads at times
- The story of Jacob and his sin is only just beginning...