

Genesis (2011) 30A

- The story of Jacob and Jacob's family is a story of human weaknesses set upon one another, while God's grace and mercy abounds
 - Jacob is a man of weaknesses, and his weaknesses propagate among his wives and children
 - He has stubbornly continued to seek after things God has not prepared for him
 - Thereby bringing consequences upon himself and his family
 - He is also a man who does not foresee the consequences of his actions, especially in the way they will mold his family
 - Jacob's choice to marry two women instantly leads to jealousy among the two women
 - Jacob pours fuel on this fire by showing favoritism to Rachel over Leah, and as sisters we can only imagine how desperately each wanted to have Jacob's attention
 - It has once been said that jealousy is bred in doubts
 - And when those doubts change into certainties, then the passion either ceases or turns into absolute madness
 - Clearly Leah had doubts concerning Jacob's love, and so she sought something to give her an upper hand in the marriage
 - So as God honored the unloved Leah, He gives her four sons before giving Rachel any children
 - But Jacob continued to ignore Leah despite the boys, leading Leah toward madness
 - Ironically, Leah lacked Jacob's love, but she could give Jacob children
 - While Rachel had Jacob's love, but couldn't give him children
 - God seems to be emphasizing that Jacob's unfair treatment of his wife Leah is not in keeping with God's intentions for bringing forth the tribes of Israel
- Meanwhile, Rachel's jealousy grows, as does her frustration at not giving her husband children

- It's also been said that jealousy is the art of injuring ourselves more than others, and Rachel proves that statement by her actions
 - This chapter sets up several important issues that come through later in the story of Jacob
 - For today, we're going to focus on the actions and consequences of each actor

Gen. 30:1 Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she became jealous of her sister; and she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die."

Gen. 30:2 Then Jacob's anger burned against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?"

Gen. 30:3 She said, "Here is my maid Bilhah, go in to her that she may bear on my knees, that through her I too may have children."

Gen. 30:4 So she gave him her maid Bilhah as a wife, and Jacob went in to her.

Gen. 30:5 Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son.

Gen. 30:6 Then Rachel said, "God has vindicated me, and has indeed heard my voice and has given me a son." Therefore she named him Dan.

Gen. 30:7 Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son.

Gen. 30:8 So Rachel said, "With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and I have indeed prevailed." And she named him Naphtali.

- Presumably, Jacob has been showing his affection to Rachel at least as much as Leah, and probably more since Jacob is attracted to Rachel more
 - Yet God is preventing Rachel from bearing children
 - As Rachel watches Leah bear son after son, her jealousy grows
 - We can assume that Leah has been having roughly one son every year, so it's been four years since the marriages
 - And still Rachel has nothing for her husband
 - It would be bad enough for a woman to fail in having children
 - But in this contest between wives, the shame is made worse by the jealousy
 - Once more the sin of multiple wives is clearly evident in this family situation
 - There is nothing natural or good about this family situation

- And now it's spilled over into discord between Rachel and Jacob
- Rachel demands that Jacob give her children or she will die
 - This statement is notable for two reasons
 - First, Rachel is speaking with great disrespect to her husband, according to the culture of the day
 - She can't accuse him of infidelity, since he has clearly fathered children with Leah
 - So she accuses him of somehow withholding his seed from her
 - It's a statement rooted in frustration and hatred for her sister, but it's directed at her husband
 - The second notable thing about her statement is its irony
 - Rachel says she will die if she doesn't have children, but in reality the opposite is true
 - Rachel will ultimately die trying to give birth
 - We'll consider that implication later
- Meanwhile, Jacob responds to Rachel's insensitive accusations
 - He is angry with her
 - The text indicates an intense form of anger
 - Her jealousy is driving a wedge between her and her husband
 - Jacob corrects his wife by reminding her that God alone controls the outcome of these things
 - His point to her is that God is responsible for her infertility
 - And we know from the text of Genesis that this is literally the truth
 - God has a reason for withholding Rachel's womb
 - There is also irony in Jacob's statement
 - He recognizes that God is at work in these outcomes, but he never stops to consider why God has done this

- Jacob doesn't stop to ask himself whether God has favored Leah for a reason, and thereby learn a lesson
- So now we see Jacob's sin begin to propagate within his family
 - Jacob's rejection of his wife Leah led to jealousy between the women
 - And this has led to a competition over children
 - And that has led Rachel to grow desperate and now to seek the wrong solution
 - Like Sarah before her, Rachel resorts to a cultural practice, one that was not in keeping with God's desires
 - Rachel gives her maiden to Jacob, meaning Jacob will take a third wife
 - Any child from this woman would be considered Rachel's child
 - That's the meaning of bearing "on my knees"
 - It refers to the way Rachel would act as midwife and deliver Bilhah's child and claim it for herself
 - Giving a maid as wife was a sin for Sarah, and it's a sin for Rachel
 - And Jacob's willingness to entertain this request is also sin, as it was for Abraham
 - Isaac and Rebekah didn't resort to this mistake, and Jacob didn't have to either
 - But having already taken a second wife, Jacob assumes what's the harm in a third?
 - And of course the harm is the multiplication of the jealousy and sin in the family
 - And the multiplication of the consequences
- With Bilhah, Jacob now produces two sons, Dan and Nephtali
 - The name Dan means judge, because Rachel says God has vindicated her
 - The word judge refers to God having declared Rachel innocent like a judge in court

- The name is a message for Leah
 - Rachel is telling Leah that the Lord is on her side now
 - This is a name soaked in jealousy and bitterness
- The second name Naphtali means I have wrestled, which is also a dig at Leah
 - Rachel is saying she wrestled or fought with Leah and won, in that she is now bearing sons for her husband through Bilhah
- Is this truly what is happening?
 - We know the Lord is allowing the children to be born, of course, and He has a good purpose in doing so
 - But His purpose is not the one Rachel has presumed
- Rachel's attitude is typical of those who are living far from the Lord and outside His will
 - They may presume to tell others what God is doing and why
 - And they always find a way to justify their circumstances as something God approves
 - They assume that the mere fact they are getting what they want is proof that it is also what God wants
 - Let's not be confused on this point today
 - We often get what we want, but it isn't what God wants
 - It's called sin, and it happens everyday
 - Every day billions of people do what they want and get what they want, but this says nothing about what God wants
 - Except that God is capable of using all that sin to accomplish some greater purpose
 - But that never equals God's approval
 - God used Satan to lead Judas in betraying Jesus, but that doesn't mean God approves of Satan

- Clearly, Rachel is engaged in a sinful war of hate and spite with Leah, a woman who is the victim in this situation
 - She is presuming that the Lord is on her side and wants her to win this fight, but that's a lie she tells herself
 - Be careful in assuming that God always sees things the way you do
 - We don't need to rely on our circumstances to discern God's desires
 - We can see for ourselves what God says He desires
 - God states in His word what He desires in men
 - And His desires bend to no man's desires
- In this case, God is speaking clearly about His wishes
 - He blessed Jacob with a woman, Leah, capable of bearing him sons
 - God brought her sons that will ultimately become priests and kings for the future nation
 - But Jacob ignored that wife, and instead chose other women
 - One woman God has kept barren for some reason, and now God has allowed the maid to bear two children, but no more
 - The number two in scripture is the number of division
 - Just as Ishmael and Isaac were divided and Esau and Jacob were divided, so is God highlighting the division in the family of Jacob
 - The woman are divided, Jacob's attention is divided, and eventually the sons will be divided
 - Those divisions run deep
 - Eventually the nation itself will split into two divisions, one named after a son of Leah and one after a son of Rachel
- The jealousy and division doesn't end here...there is more

Gen. 30:9 When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took her maid Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife.

[Gen. 30:10](#) Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son.

[Gen. 30:11](#) Then Leah said, "How fortunate!" So she named him Gad.

[Gen. 30:12](#) Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son.

[Gen. 30:13](#) Then Leah said, "Happy am I! For women will call me happy." So she named him Asher.

- We're told that Leah noticed she had stopped bearing, but there is no indication that God has stopped her from having children
 - The cause is more likely the lack of Jacob's affection
 - So far Jacob has four sons with Leah and two more with Bilhah
 - We know he prefers Rachel and probably spent his nights with Leah strictly because she was bearing children
 - But once Bilhah started bearing, Jacob focused his attention and energy there
 - Plus he was still showing affection to Rachel, though it had not produced any children
 - So Leah has noticed that she isn't getting much of Jacob's time
 - Perhaps Jacob has tired of her company, plus he has two other wives to attend to
 - So she hatches a plan to compete with Rachel
 - Leah offers Jacob her maid
 - The attraction for Jacob at this point is purely lust
 - He has no need for another wife and he has already seen six sons come along, which was plenty for a family in that day
 - Still he agrees to take the maid, so the only reason we can assume is because he is following his flesh
 - More importantly, Jacob has clearly abdicated any leadership among these women and within his growing family
 - We'll see that weakness time and time again in later chapters of Genesis, as his sons begin to rule the household
- Leah's maid Zilpah bears two sons, Gad and Asher

- Gad comes from the Hebrew word for fortunate, while Asher means happy
 - Like Rachel, Leah is naming these sons in a way to insult her sister
 - No longer is she praising the Lord for these blessings, now she is seeking to injure and discourage another in her family
 - If this keeps up, one of them is bound to name a son “Nah nah na na nah” to mock the other
- Once again God delivers only two children to the fourth wife, yet another coded message of division
- But the story of the children isn’t over yet

Gen. 30:14 Now in the days of wheat harvest Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, “Please give me some of your son’s mandrakes.”

Gen. 30:15 But she said to her, “Is it a small matter for you to take my husband? And would you take my son’s mandrakes also?” So Rachel said, “Therefore he may lie with you tonight in return for your son’s mandrakes.”

Gen. 30:16 When Jacob came in from the field in the evening, then Leah went out to meet him and said, “You must come in to me, for I have surely hired you with my son’s mandrakes.” So he lay with her that night.

Gen. 30:17 God gave heed to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son.

Gen. 30:18 Then Leah said, “God has given me my wages because I gave my maid to my husband.” So she named him Issachar.

Gen. 30:19 Leah conceived again and bore a sixth son to Jacob.

Gen. 30:20 Then Leah said, “God has endowed me with a good gift; now my husband will dwell with me, because I have borne him six sons.” So she named him Zebulun.

Gen. 30:21 Afterward she bore a daughter and named her Dinah.

- Jacob’s oldest son is probably about five or six years old at this point
 - And he is out in the field during the harvest when he finds a flower, called a mandrake
 - A mandrake is a rare wild plant that has blueish flowers in winter and yellowish plum size fruit in summer
 - Prized as an aphrodisiac and inducer of fertility
 - It’s name is *duday* from *dud* which means beloved

- Called the love-apple in the Middle east
- This is obviously why both women desired it
- Reuben probably brought it to his mother, Leah, as a simple gift like any son might bring a flower to his mother
 - But when Rachel sees it, she immediately recognizes it as the plant that might solve her infertility problem
 - Remember, of Jacob's four wives, only Rachel has failed to bring Jacob a son
 - So she asks Leah for some of the mandrakes
- Leah is bitter and jealous of Jacob's love for Rachel, so she asks Rachel why she wants the mandrakes since she already has Jacob to herself
 - The implication is that Rachel receives Jacob's company regularly, so why should she need the mandrake
 - We can gather that this is why Leah hasn't had a chance to conceive more sons
 - Rachel was able to wrestle Jacob away from Leah
 - Apart from the two children to Zilpah, Rachel has prevented Jacob from giving Leah any more children since the original four
 - So Leah decides to negotiate with Rachel
 - Rachel wants children, while Leah wants Jacob's affection again
 - So Rachel says she will sell her husband to Leah for one night in exchange for the mandrakes
- Leah tells Jacob about the arrangement, and he complies
 - Was Jacob obligated by this deal? Absolutely not
 - He could have refused, since he was not a party to the arrangement
 - Yet he agreed, once again we presume he was willing to play along either because he wasn't prone to leading within the family

- Or perhaps he was enamored by their competition for his affection
- Either way, Jacob is feeding the flames of a dangerous fire
- In describing their time together that night, the scripture says in v.16 that Jacob lay with Leah
 - The word for lay or lie is a special word in Hebrew only used in the context of illicit sexual activity
 - It was used for Lot and his daughters
 - And it will be used to describe Potiphar's wife's offer to Joseph
 - By the choice of word, Moses is indicating that this is not a sanctifying act in the marriage bed
 - They are married, but they are acting in sin because their behavior is driven by jealousy and sinful hearts rather than out of love or a desire to follow the Lord
 - This is not the way the Lord wants to build their marriage or this family
 - Nevertheless, Leah is not barren and she will continue to bear children
- That night brings her another son, Issachar
 - The name means hire, since Leah hired Jacob with a mandrake
 - Later, Leah receives a sixth son, Zebulun
 - After Leah produced the son Issachar, Jacob probably returned to giving Leah some of his time
 - And since Leah was capable of bearing children, she bore another son
 - His name means endowed or dowry, since these sons are gifts for Leah
 - Notice again that Leah has returned to thanking the Lord with the name of the last son
 - She seems to have lost her appetite for attacking Rachel

- Later, Leah will bear other daughters, including Dinah
 - Women aren't normally mentioned in Genesis, but Dinah plays an important role in the story of Jacob later
- Finally, God brings His grace to Rachel, so that she might bear a child for Jacob

[Gen. 30:22](#) Then God remembered Rachel, and God gave heed to her and opened her womb.

[Gen. 30:23](#) So she conceived and bore a son and said, "God has taken away my reproach."

[Gen. 30:24](#) She named him Joseph, saying, "May the LORD give me another son."

- When God is ready to show himself to Rachel, He gives her a son
 - He's waited long enough for Leah to have become pregnant at least two more times
 - He doesn't want Rachel's pregnancy to be credited to the mandrakes
 - Those flowers would have been long gone by the time He decided to bring Joseph
 - Her choice of a name is interesting and ironic
 - She names her son Joseph, which means He shall add, because she hoped the Lord would add another child to her
 - God eventually does give her a second child, but since two is the number of division, the second child will divide her from her family
 - She will die in childbirth
- Let's end by considering God's wisdom in how He used the sin of these women and Jacob especially
 - First, notice that God's choice of wife for Jacob was Leah who had six children by herself
 - Had Jacob stuck to Leah alone, there is no reason to doubt the Lord could have brought forth all twelve sons from her womb
 - Secondly, every other wife of Jacob will have two sons, though Rachel has yet to bear her second son

- The other wives all represent division in the family of Jacob, while Leah has the honor of bearing three times as many sons
- Three being the number of God
- Third, Rachel will die in giving birth to her second child
 - Can we see the wisdom in God giving Leah to Jacob rather than Rachel?
 - It would appear that Rachel wasn't able to live through 12 births
 - God knew that giving her sons would bring her to an end, so He graciously kept her barren for several years
 - But sometimes, God may eventually give us what we desire just to prove us wrong
- Finally, all eleven of these sons are born within the seven years that Jacob will work for Laban to pay for Rachel
 - The conceptions happened in the order mentioned, but obviously many of these women were pregnant at the same time
 - So that by the time Jacob is ready to leave the land, he will have already acquired all but one of his sons
 - Nevertheless, God used Jacob's sin and the jealousy of the women to bring the nation of Israel into existence in a rapid time, so that these sons were of similar age
 - Thus ensuring that the family would live and grow together, thus allowing the Lord to direct their lives in unison according to His plan
 - The final son is born as Jacob leaves Laban's household
- But the sin of this family, lead by the sin of the patriarch, will continue to fester in the lives of these boys leading to several crises
 - Including the most significant crisis in Jacob's life in about ten chapters from now