

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Rachel and Leah: Used for God's Glory (Despite Themselves)

Genesis 29:14-30; 31:17-34; 35:10

February 13, 2022

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Today's message has three points:

- Sin complicates our lives.
- Sin has consequences.
- Sin does not have the final say.

INTRODUCTION: I'm starting a series of sermons on the life of Joseph, and I am introducing it with several messages about the women in Joseph's lineage.

- First, we had Sarah, Abraham's wife.
- Abraham and Sarah had a son named Isaac, and he had wife named Rebekah who I talked about last week. Isaac and Rebekah had two sons named Jacob and Esau. We ended our lesson with Rebekah and Jacob's intentional and deceitful theft of Isaac's paternal blessing. As a result, his brother Esau was angry enough to want to kill him. Rebekah convinced Isaac to send Jacob away in search of a wife from among her family, and Jacob fled. As far as we know, Jacob never saw his mother again.
- Jacob married Rachel, and they were the parents of Joseph.

Jacob and Rachel's story began much like Jacob's parents, Isaac and Rebekah. They met first at a well in Haran where Rachel, a shepherdess, was watering her flocks. Rachel is the daughter of Rebekah's brother, Laban. Therefore, she is Jacob's cousin. While it is taboo today, during this time, marriages within a family were the norm.

SIN COMPLICATES OUR LIVES

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 29:14-30

Then Laban said to him, "You are my own flesh and blood." After Jacob had stayed with him for a whole month, ¹⁵ Laban said to him, "Just because you are a

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relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be.”¹⁶ Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel.¹⁷ Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful.¹⁸ Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, “I’ll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel.”¹⁹ Laban said, “It’s better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me.”²⁰ So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.²¹ Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to make love to her.”²² So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast.²³ But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and Jacob made love to her.²⁴ And Laban gave his servant Zilpah to his daughter as her attendant.²⁵ When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, did not I? Why have you deceived me?”²⁶ Laban replied, “It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one.²⁷ Finish this daughter’s bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work.”²⁸ And Jacob did so. He finished the week with Leah, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife.²⁹ Laban gave his servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her attendant.³⁰ Jacob made love to Rachel also, and his love for Rachel was greater than his love for Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years.

EXPLANATION: This is definitely an unusual story, and there is a lot we could discuss here. But remember, our primary goal right now is to learn about the women in Joseph’s life. So, we are going to concentrate on Rachel and Leah. Rachel and Leah were sisters. Leah was the older, and Rachel was the younger. The term “weak eyes” seems to indicate that Rachel was more attractive than Leah. Jacob fell in love with Rachel, and his uncle Laban made an arrangement with Jacob for their marriage, but he did not follow through in the way he promised.

On the wedding day, Leah, who would have been covered in a veil, was passed off as Rachel, and it was not until the next morning—in the clear light of day—that Jacob became aware of what had happened. Laban deceived Jacob much in the same way that Jacob had deceived his own father. Ultimately, however, Jacob wound up marrying both Leah and Rachel.

ILLUSTRATION: History is full of examples of men and women who lived notoriously sinful lives before they came to know Christ.

- St. Augustine denounced his faith, lived with a mistress, and had a child out of wedlock before he came to know the Lord.
- Matthew, the disciple, was a tax collector, men who were notorious for cheating people and taking more than what they needed or earned.
- Paul, formerly called Saul, was a murderer.

God can and does change lives and use all sorts of people for His glory. However, while God redeems sinners, he does not always remove the consequences of their sin in this lifetime.

- A drug addict who becomes a Christian may still deal with the ailments that have resulted from his years of abuse.
- A compulsive gambler who comes to know Jesus will not necessarily recover all the wealth he lost in Vegas.

Our sin affects us and the people around us in ways we sometimes have to live with for the rest of our lives.

APPLICATION: It's obvious that sin was at the root of Jacob's unusual marriage relationship. Polygamy was a common practice during the Old Testament times, but nowhere in the Bible does God endorse it. Nowhere does he tell his followers to marry more than one wife at a time. God created Eve to be Adam's wife. He made one man and one woman, and that has always been his perfect plan for marriage.

Jacob, Leah, and Rachel's marriage arrangement resulted in a lifetime of hurt. Leah, who likely had no say in what took place, was thrust into a relationship where she was unwanted. As a result, she was jealous of Jacob's love for Rachel. Rachel most likely resented Leah's intrusion into the marriage and her ability to have children. Jacob was left to navigate a complicated relationship between the two women. The "dos and do nots" of the Bible are not just an arbitrary list of rules. They are God's way of helping us live safe, full, and joyful lives. God is not trying to keep good from us. He knows that sin complicates our lives.

SIN HAS CONSEQUENCES

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 31:17-34

Then Jacob put his children and his wives on camels, ¹⁸ and he drove all his livestock ahead of him, along with all the goods he had accumulated in Paddan Aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan. ¹⁹ When Laban had gone to shear his sheep, Rachel stole her father's household gods. ²⁰ Moreover, Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him he was running away. ²¹ So he fled with all he had, crossed the Euphrates River, and headed for the hill country of Gilead...²⁵ Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country of Gilead when Laban overtook him, and Laban and his relatives camped there too. ²⁶ Then Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done? You've deceived me, and you've carried off my daughters like captives in war. ²⁷ Why did you run off secretly and deceive me? Why did not you tell me, so I could send you away with joy and singing to the music of timbrels and harps? ²⁸ You did not even let me kiss my grandchildren and my daughters goodbye. You have done a foolish thing. ²⁹ I have the power to harm you; but last night the God of your father said to me, 'Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.' ³⁰ Now you have gone off because you longed to return to your father's household. But why did you steal my gods?" ³¹ Jacob answered Laban, "I was afraid, because I thought you would take your daughters away from me by force. ³² But if you find anyone who has your gods, that person shall not live. In the presence of our relatives, see for yourself whether there is anything of yours here with me; and if so, take it." Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods.³³ So Laban went into Jacob's tent and into Leah's tent and into the tent of the two female servants, but he found nothing. After he came out of Leah's tent, he entered Rachel's tent. ³⁴ Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them inside her camel's saddle and was sitting on them. Laban searched through everything in the tent but found nothing."

EXPLANATION: Eventually, Jacob decided to leave Laban and head back to Canaan, the country that God had promised to Abraham and his descendants. Leah and Rachel had no problem leaving their father. The relationships between all the family members were dysfunctional, and there seemed to be no love lost. However, Rachel, for reasons unknown, stole her father's idols.

There are many stories in the Old Testament that remind us of the dangers of false gods, and Rachel's theft was a very dangerous one indeed. Had she been caught by

her father or husband, she could have been killed. However, to our knowledge, no one ever found out about the theft. Laban and Jacob agreed to part peacefully, and the families separated.

ILLUSTRATION: Here are some biblical examples of people whose sins had high price tags:

- Moses was allowed to come into the presence of the Lord to receive God's commands, but because of his sin, God did not allow him to enter the Promised Land.
- Solomon was hand-picked by God to be the king of Israel, but because of his sin, he and his heirs lost the throne.
- David was a man after God's own heart, but his sin cost him the life of a son and resulted in continual family conflict with his remaining children.
- Jacob received his father's blessing, but he never saw his mother again and was tricked into a difficult marriage.

We could go on and on. Sin always has consequences.

APPLICATION: Very little is said about Rachel from this point on. At the beginning of Genesis 35, there is an interesting story where Jacob asked everyone in his household to surrender their foreign gods. They get rid of them and purify themselves in worship to the Lord. Did Rachel come clean then? We do not know. The Bible does not tell us what happened. However, shortly after that account, we are told of her death. The family is not near enough to the family burial ground. So, Rachel is buried alone. Her death somehow seems premature, and I cannot help but wonder if it was connected in any way to that secret sin.

Like Rachel, we may have private sins, sins that no one else knows about. We may think that because they are secret, we have gotten away with them. We forget that God knows all about them, and God always takes sin seriously. Other people may never know about our sins and may never see the consequences that we reap as a result of them, but that does not mean there are no consequences.

- Sin complicates our lives.
- Sin has consequences.

SIN DOES NOT HAVE THE FINAL SAY

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 35:10

God said to him, “Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel.” So he named him Israel....

EXPLANATION: Jacob, Leah, and Rachel’s unusual marriage caused a war within their home. Leah tried to earn Jacob’s love by bearing him children, specifically sons. Before God blessed Rachel with her sons (Joseph and Benjamin), she gave Jacob a maidservant named Bilhah who bore sons. When it seemed that Leah could no longer bear children of her own, she followed Rachel’s example. Therefore, Jacob (whose name God later changed to Israel) had children by four women—12 of them were sons. Perhaps you recognize the names. They are, of course, the 12 tribes of Israel, God’s chosen people.

When you read through the Old Testament, it becomes very clear that the men and women God used had no merit of their own. Like us, they had personality traits that were good and personality traits that were not. They did things that were right, and often they did things that were wrong. While history often looks back on them with reverence, they were sinners just like you and me—liars, deceivers, manipulators, thieves, and, at times, idolators. Yet, God blessed and used them despite their sin.

SCRIPTURE: Titus 3:4-7 says,

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

God chose Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel and Leah, not because they were perfect people, not because they deserved it. He chose them because of his own kindness, grace, and mercy. Because of his love, he allowed their families to grow into the nation of Israel, from which his son, Jesus Christ, would come to offer salvation to us all.

Sin is serious. It separates us from our God.

- Sin complicates things.
- Sin has consequences, but
- Sin—in the lives of God-followers, does not get the final say.

When we give our lives to Christ, he can take even the most broken pieces of our lives and use them for his glory.

INVITATION Have you asked Jesus to forgive you for your sins? Have you given your heart and life to him? Unless you trust Christ for the salvation of your sins, then sin will still be your master. For those of you who know Jesus, are you living your life in obedience to his commands, or are you hiding your secret sins and praying that no one sees? Let me assure you, God does see. Do not try to sabotage God's work in your life. Confess your sins and ask for forgiveness. Allow God to begin the restoration process in your heart.

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