

Genesis Ch29v31-Ch30v24 - Beauty In The Brokenness

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[0 : 00] Today and how God is at work in the midst of lives. Again, if you've missed any of the talks, there was a bit of a lull there for a while, but thankfully Ralph has been able to sort that out in the website, so the recent talks are all now up online again, and you can catch up or follow along if you missed any.

We are reading this morning Genesis 29 verse 31 to chapter 30 verse 24, and Kirsty is going to read this morning.

When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he enabled her to conceive, but Rachel remained childless. Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son.

She named him Reuben, for she said, It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now. She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son, she said, Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too.

So she named him Simeon. Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son, she said, Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have born him three sons.

[1 : 23] So he was named Levi. She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son, she said, This time I will praise the Lord. So she named him Judah.

Then she stopped having children. When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, Give me children or I will die.

Jacob became angry with her and said, Am I in the place of God who has kept you from having children? Then she said, Here is Bilhah, my servant.

Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me, and I too can build a family through her. So she gave him her servant, Bilhah, as a wife. Jacob slept with her, and she became pregnant and bore him a son.

Then Rachel said, God has vindicated me. He has listened to my plea and given me a son.

Because of this, she named him Dan. Rachel's servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son.

[2 : 27] Then Rachel said, I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won. So she named him Naphtali. When Leah saw that she had stopped having children, she took her servant, Zilpah, and gave her to Jacob as a wife.

Leah's servant, Zilpah, bore Jacob a son. Then Leah said, What good fortune? So she named him Gad. Leah's servant, Zilpah, bore Jacob a second son.

Then Leah said, How happy I am. The women will call me happy. So she called him Asher. During wheat harvest, Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants when he brought to his mother Leah.

Rachel said to Leah, Please give me some of your son's mandrakes. But she said to her, Wasn't it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrakes too?

Very well, Rachel said. He can sleep with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes. So when Jacob came in from the fields that evening, Leah went out to meet him.

[3 : 35] You must sleep with me, she said. I've hired you with my son's mandrakes. So he slept with her that night. God listened to Leah, and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son.

Then Leah said, God has rewarded me for giving my servant to my husband. So she named him Issachar. Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son.

Then Leah said, God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with honor because I have borne him six sons. So she named him Zebulun.

Sometime later, she gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah. Then God remembered Rachel. He listened to her and enabled her to conceive.

She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, God has taken away my disgrace. She named him Joseph and said, May the Lord add to me another son.

[4 : 38] Thank you, Kirsty.

Great stories, aren't they? But they're not just stories. They're true stories. Before we look at it, if anybody wants notes this morning, the sheets that we hand out or a pen, I forgot to pass them out earlier.

Alex is standing patiently if any of you want them. just wave a hand and he will bring it to you. No takers. Thanks, Alex.

Well, let's pray and ask for God's help as we look at his word together. Our Father God, thank you so much for these accounts, these true records of an ancient family and all that they went through. not as examples for us, but demonstrations of the great God that you are, who is at work in the midst of many difficulties and struggles.

[6 : 06] And Father, you look down upon us today. You are present here with us. And you know each of our hearts. You know what we struggle with.

You know the things that we find hard. And so we pray that you would speak to us afresh. And that you would give to us all that we need as we seek to follow you in our life.

So help us, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. One husband, four wives, twelve children.

It's a mess, isn't it? Jacob's selfish choices and sinful decisions has led to a life of sadness and hurt, jealousy and rivalry, division and despair.

It's a picture of what happens when we leave God out of our lives and go it alone. And maybe as we read this story, you're thinking, gosh, that's a bit like my family.

[7 : 22] Maybe you feel hurt and sad from family experiences. Maybe you're experiencing division and despair. We face all kinds of struggles, don't we, with family relationships, friend relationships.

And we wonder, is there any way through all of the mess? Yet behind the scenes of this story, we'll see that there is a beauty in the brokenness.

There is hope in the despair. because as we follow this true account, we see the goodness and kindness of God.

The God who longs to restore broken lives and renew this disordered world. We're going to look at four big themes.

We're going to see God's love, God's mercy, God's faithfulness and God's grace. And as each one piles upon each other, so we will see the beauty in the brokenness.

[8 : 29] So first, let's look at God's love for the unloved. God's love for the unloved. It was meant to be a wedding they would never forget.

Jacob was marrying the love of his life, Rachel, except her father, Laban, had other plans. Just go back a couple of verses to chapter 29, verse 22.

It's on the eve of the wedding of Jacob and Rachel. Chapter 29, verse 22. So Laban the father brought together all the people of that place and gave a great feast.

This is a wedding celebration. Plenty of food, the wine was flowing. But when evening came, under the cover of darkness, and when the wine had taken its effect, he took his daughter Leah, not Rachel, and brought her to Jacob.

And Jacob made love to her, and Laban gave his servant Zilpah to his daughter as her attendant.

And when morning came, when Jacob woke up, my goodness me, there was Leah.

[9 : 45] It turned out to be a wedding they would not forget for all the wrong reasons. Well, despite Jacob being married off to Leah, Jacob also married Rachel too.

So he has two wives. But there was only love for one wife. Look at verse 30, chapter 29. Jacob made love to Rachel also, and his love for Rachel was greater than his love for Leah.

Leah was used by her father in his cunning plan, and now Leah is unloved by her husband. She felt it and she knew it.

But so did God. Look at verse 31. When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved.

God's not immune to what's going on. God saw that Leah was literally hated by her husband. In fact, because Rachel couldn't have children, Jacob used Leah.

[11 : 01] What a desperate existence for her. Leah's only value was to produce children for an unloving husband. And when the deed was done, Leah was discarded.

Well, God saw her brokenness and heartache. And he does something about it because that's what God does. When he sees, he acts.

He gets involved. In fact, the names of the children reveal this. God enables Leah to conceive and she gives birth to her first son. Look at verse 32.

She gives birth to her first son who she calls Reuben, which means it's because the Lord has seen my misery. Then she has another son who she calls Simeon and he's called Simeon because the Lord heard that I am not loved.

You could imagine a young Reuben and Simeon playing outside and Leah calling them in for dinner. The Lord has seen my misery. The Lord has heard I'm not loved.

[12:11] Dinner time. Now such name calling can be strange to us. But every time she called their names it was a reminder not just about her husband but of God's love to her.

God sees her misery. God hears her pain. God knows Leah is unloved and so God reaches down and he loves her.

Now isn't that what we all so desperately need to know? That where we are right now God sees you in your misery. He sees your heartache and he loves you.

God hears your cry of pain and your hurts and he loves you. In fact God's love is a steadfast love. Leah is desperate for love. She longs doesn't she for the affection of her husband. Leah hopes that by giving children to Jacob somehow his hardened heart will soften and he will show some kind of affection and love towards her.

[13:28] Give her a hug at least. we can feel her longing. Look at verse 2. Surely my husband will love me now. And as she gives birth again in verse 34.

Now at last my husband will become attached to me. The vows he made will become true.

But love never came. But what she does discover that in all her human disappointments is a love that's never going to let her go.

Look at verse 35. She conceived again and when she gave birth to a son she said this time I will praise the Lord.

So she named him Judah which means praise. I think that this is a humble recognition on behalf of Leah that all her hopes in people all her dreams in something else will always let us down.

[15:04] The loves of this world will never satisfy but there is one who is loyal. Despite all the mess and brokenness we can praise the Lord because God's love is steadfast.

Hear his voice to you today. God loves you. God loves you. So first God's love for the unloved.

Second we're going to see God's mercy in the madness because this is where the madness really kicks off.

If God sees and he acts in love Rachel also sees and acts but not in love. Chapter 30 verse 1 when Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children she became jealous of her sister.

So she said to Jacob give me children or I'll die. And so the blame game begins fighting and squabbling. And what follows are the results of bitter rivalry.

[16:21] Because Rachel can't conceive she hands over her maid servant. Verse 3 She said here's Bilhah my servant sleep with her so that she can bear children for me and I too can build a family through her.

And Bilhah has two children for Rachel. The first called Dan which means God has vindicated me or God's justice. The second she calls Naphtali which means I have won.

Well Leah's not going to stand for this is she? So she responds by giving her maid servant to Jacob verse 9 When Leah saw that she had stopped having children she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife and she also has two children the first is called Gad which means lucky or good fortune the second is called Asher which means I'm happy again we can imagine these four children at the school gates waiting for their mothers to appear Rachel arrives to collect her children and with a sly look at Leah calls her first son God's justice and he comes running over Leah in response shouts out in delight good fortune and he runs over and gives her a big hug well Rachel's not going to be outdone so she shouts out for all to hear I have won and well as little I have won comes skipping through the gate Leah with a beaming smile calls out I'm happy well her behaviour is shameful isn't it the children have become innocent weapons in a war of rivalry the maids servants are used and abused in a game for power but perhaps what is worse is they both claim to have God on their side God has blessed me this is what God is doing in my life well yes God is at work but not in the ways they could ever imagine you see the wonder in all of this is that

God doesn't abandon them or give up on them it seems God's patience with these two fighting sisters is immense it truly is a case of their sins they are many but his mercy is more now doesn't this tell us something about how

God treats us how many relationships have we been in and we have seen them break and fall apart maybe within our own very family units or within our friendships there's a breakdown and things aren't the same not just because of what others have done to us but perhaps because of how we have reacted yes we've all been hurt we can tell our stories of how people have said things and done things but haven't we hurt others too we mightn't call our children God's justice but we sure know how to hand it out by our refusal to forgive and we mightn't declare I have won but don't we inwardly replay our arguments in our minds over and over again so that we come out the winners and we're always on top isn't it a wonder that

[20 : 16] God doesn't abandon us all together amazingly God does not treat us as our sins deserve so second note God's mercy in the madness third God's faithfulness over the unfaithful now when we think things can't get any worse we have the incident of the mandrakes ever had mandrakes delivered to your house well Reuben brings in his mom a bunch of flowers or perhaps their fruits as well we're not quite sure one day after work he brings in these mandrakes and well Rachel kicks off doesn't she because she wants the flowers too not red roses I want mandrakes well what's the interest in mandrakes well commentators tell us that they were a symbol for fertility perhaps it was the scent of the flowers or the taste of the fruits it was like an aphrodisiac this is going to help me anyways

Rachel has no kids that's what we've learned not of her own anyway so she wants to try out the fertility flowers maybe that's going to help Leah is not too keen on sharing the flowers but for the chance of having Jacob for the night well she'll pass on the mandrakes to Rachel so Rachel trades in her husband who also happens to be Leah's husband as well by the way for the fertility flowers verse 16 so when Jacob came in from the fields that evening Leah went out to meet him Jacob you're sleeping with me tonight it's pathetic isn't it it seems Jacob has gotten used to being told with who he must sleep with his role as a husband is gone he's lost all respect and all honour what is this strange incident all about well

I think it's here to tell us that it is God who is ultimately in control and it is God alone who gives life not Jacob and not fertility flowers look at verse 17 because God listened to Leah and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son and on it went and she had other sons don't you think it's strange that these fertility flowers were passed over to Rachel well she didn't get pregnant but Leah did you see God is in control here God is working according to his purposes and his plans and what are those purposes and plans well remember what God's promise has been all the way along God had promised that they would have a nation that he would have a people for himself it started with Abraham your offspring will be as numerous as the stars in the sky the same promise was handed down to

Isaac you will be fruitful and increase in numbers Isaac and that was passed down to his son Jacob your descendants will be like the dust of the earth love love and is not what we see happening in all the madness and all the mess baby after baby Jacob's family is increasing well you say 12 kids is not quite a nation no it's not there aren't so many that he can't count them all but nations begin somewhere don't they and right now he's got a whole clutter of kids.

You see, in the midst of all the unfaithfulness, God is remaining faithful to his promise and working out his purposes.

[24 : 45] God promised a people for himself and he's going to do it. Despite all the rivalries and all the bitterness, the division and the despair, God is at work.

Now we mustn't think that God approves or condones all this family's mad behaviour, but what it is telling us is simply that God's people, God's family, is going to be made up of broken people.

Now doesn't that give us a little bit of hope? That despite all of our mess and our sinful lives and all our decisions and all our choices, God could possibly include you and me, that we could be part of his family too.

God's faithfulness over the unfaithful. And then, God's grace to the disgraced.

Rachel may be loved by Jacob, but her situation was not easy. Let's go back to chapter 29, verse 31. When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he enabled her to conceive, but Rachel remained childless.

[26 : 14] Now that's always hard. It's always painful. And especially in a culture where a woman's value and worth was measured by how many children you had.

The shame and the stigma was breaking Rachel. Yes, she had the love of her husband, but to everybody else looking in on the situation, she was a loser.

Not fit for purpose. But instead of prayerful submission, Rachel takes things into her own hands. She's driven by jealousy, eaten up by bitterness and angry.

She uses her servant and trades her in for her husband. Yeah, we can understand Rachel's hurt and pain, but at the same time, Rachel really isn't a nice person, is she?

We might be quick to write off a Rachel, but God... Look at verse 22 of chapter 30. Then God remembered Rachel.

[27 : 30] He listened to her and enabled her to conceive. It's not like that God had forgotten Rachel, that you've kind of gone absent-minded for a while and forgotten all about her.

No, when God remembers, it always points to an action of saving. God acts on behalf of the lost and the broken. We can see that back in Genesis chapter 8 when God remembers Noah and he intervenes and he acts to save.

And God remembers Rachel and he enables her to have a son. You see, this is God's gracious intervention.

She has a son. Her shame is removed. Her stigma is gone. In the words of Rachel herself, look at the end of verse 23, God has taken away my disgrace.

No longer a loser, but a treasured person. No longer an outsider, but valued. You see, this is what God does. God takes away our disgrace.

[28 : 43] He takes what is worthless in the eyes of the world and gives us a position that is immeasurable. This is the kind of God we deal with.

This is beauty in the brokenness. This is how God works. This is the story of the whole Bible. In fact, what God has done for Rachel, God has done for you and for me in a greater and more eternal way than we could ever imagine.

Because God sees our disgrace. He sees and knows our shame and our guilt. He sees our sinful choices, our selfish decisions.

He sees how we're crushed by the standards that others place upon us. He hears our cries as we suffer under the weight of family expectations.

He remembers us. And he intervenes and he acts on our behalf and he saves us. He does this through his son, Jesus Christ, the one who would come from Jacob's family.

[30 : 06] Turn with me, please, to Romans chapter 5. Romans chapter 5. Verse 6.

As we think of how God has intervened into our world, the God who longs to renew our broken lives and restore this disordered world.

Let's pick it up in verse 6. Romans 5, verse 6. You see, at just the right time, according to God's good plan and purposes, when we were still powerless, unable to change our situation, Christ died for the ungodly.

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person. Though for a good person, someone might possibly dare to die.

But God? Well, God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, sinners, Christ died for you and for me.

[31 : 32] When we were powerless and unloved, when we were unfaithful, when we were enemies and sinners, God in his love showed grace to the disgraced.

Because when we humbly trust in Jesus, he intervenes and he renews and he restores and he gives us a brand new status and position.

He takes away the shame and the stigma. We become children of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, broken people made beautiful for God's family.

We are forever welcomed and accepted. A value that no price could ever be put on us. Our God's loved ones.

This is his love. This is his mercy. This is his faithfulness. This is his grace to people like you and me.

[32 : 47] Hear his voice to you today. I love you. I love you. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Father, sometimes all we can ever see is the brokenness all around us.

The brokenness that has hurt us. The brokenness that has affected our families and our friendships. But yet in the midst of it all there is a shining light of hope. There is extraordinary beauty. God sees. God hears. And God has acted through his Son. God has poured out his love his mercy his faithfulness and his grace. And he offers new beginnings fresh starts to all who will trust in him.

[34 : 19] How can we not but adore you and worship you? For you are good and you are kind.

Thank you for your love to us today. Help us that we might show this same love to the broken world around us.

In Jesus' name. Amen. We are going to sing a song of praise.

Leah called her son Judah which means praise because of God's love