

Real Love and The Girl Nobody Wanted

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. I'm Shantanez and welcome this morning. I'll be reading the scripture. I'm part of the Oakland Women's Chatting Over Tea group and you can join us every third Wednesday of the month. Let's focus on the word.

I'll be reading from the scripture, Genesis 29, 1 and 2, and then 10 through 35. Please follow me. Then Jacob continued on his journey and came to the land of the eastern peoples.

There he saw a well in the open country with three flocks of sheep lying near it because the flocks were watered from the well. The stone over the mouth of the well was large.

[1 : 12] When Jacob saw Rachel, daughter of his uncle Laban and Laban's sheep, he went over and rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well and watered his uncle's sheep. Then Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep aloud.

He had told Rachel that he was a relative of her father and a son of Rebecca. So she ran and told her father. As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he hurried to meet him. He embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his home. And there Jacob told him all these things. Then Laban said to him, you are my own flesh and blood.

After Jacob had stayed with him for a whole month, Laban said to him, just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be.

Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah. The name of the younger was Rachel. Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful.

[2 : 17] Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, I will work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter, Rachel. Laban said, it's better that I give her to you than to some other man.

Stay here with me. So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel. But they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.

Then Jacob said to Laban, give me my wife. My time is completed and I want to make love to her. So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast.

But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her here to Jacob. And Jacob made love to her. And Laban gave his servant Zalpha to his daughter as her attendant.

When morning came, there was Leah. So Jacob said to Laban, what is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me?

[3 : 19] Laban replied, it is not our custom here to give the younger daughter to marriage before the older one finished this daughter's bridal week. Then we will give you the younger one also in return for another seven years work.

And Jacob did so. He finished the week with Leah. And then Laban gave him his daughter, Rachel, to be his wife. Laban gave his servant, Belhah, to his daughter, Rachel, as her attendant.

Jacob made love to Rachel also. And his love for Rachel was greater than his love for Leah. He worked for Laban another seven years. 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.

[4 : 30] 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. 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. The grass withers and the flowers fade. The word of our Lord stands for the Lord.

Thanks, Shantanez. Good morning. So full disclosure, I have preached on this passage before here at Christ Church. It was over five years ago.

But it shouldn't be that big a deal because who of you remembers even what I said, you know, two weeks ago, right? But for that like super tiny percentage of you who do listen to what I say and even remember, some of this might sound familiar.

[5 : 36] But I promise you that I did ask the Lord for something fresh this week to share with you. And a word from God that's been on my heart this week is something from the book of Lamentations.

Lamentations is where the people of God are crying out to him, grieving, lamenting over the destruction of their homeland because of their sins, because of their unfaithfulness. But then as you go through the book of Lamentations, in chapter three, there's this really beautiful line that comes in after all the grief, after all the lament.

And it says this. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercy never comes to an end.

They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, says my soul. Therefore, I will hope in him. And I wanted to share that with you this morning because in many ways, again, I don't have something super new to share with you.

I've preached this passage before. That this could be just another Sunday that you're going to hear from your pastor that God loves you. And the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. And I know that most of you already believe that.

[6 : 46] Most of you already believe that his mercies are new every morning. But if we are honest, I think a lot of us don't feel the freshness of his mercies new every morning.

They feel more like stale bread. The thing we habitually swallow week in and week out but never actually taste. And then we wonder while we go the rest of the week feeling so flat, so weary, so empty, so uninspired.

So I want to pray for us right now that God would open our ears and our hearts to receive not just his word but his love. His steadfast, unceasing love for us. I want to pray that we would encounter a God who doesn't force feed us stale old mercies but offers us fresh new mercies every morning. Don't you want that? Let's ask our Father who wants to give that to us right now. Father, we come before you ever thankful that your love is deep and that your love is wide.

It's as high as the heavens are over the earth. And that you have set that love upon us. And Lord, we, many of us come here every week to confess that love.

[7 : 54] But so many of us also do not experience and encounter and believe that love is real for us. And for many of us, that love has not changed at all how we live.

We still live anxiously. We still live in our insecurities. We still live in bondage. Lord, pursuing other loves that we think need to supplement your love for us.

But God, I pray that you would convince us of your love. Your perfect love. And that it is enough. That the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.

And that your mercies toward us are new. They are fresh every day. Lord, fall upon us fresh this morning. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. So, you know, in my role here as a pastor of care, in my many, like, countless conversations with a lot of people, I could, if I could simply reduce all the hurt that's been shared with me, I could say that in every conversation, the person I'm sitting across from is a person ultimately hurting for, aching for, and longing for love.

[9 : 11] Single people waiting to be desired. Married people wondering if they still are. People in every season, really all of us, anxiously wondering, am I lovable? Am I lovable?

It shows up in all sorts of ways, but the ache underneath is almost always the same. Every person in this room, whether you're a youth or whether you're retired, every person in this room knows what it's like to ache for love.

To long for someone to choose us. Give us significance. Confirm to us that we matter. That we have value and that we are desirable.

And this ache, this longing, it powerfully drives us. It fuels our actions, our behaviors. Even the secular anthropologist, Ernest Becker, he noticed this ache and the power of this ache in his Pulitzer Prize winner, the denial of death.

He observed that when people stopped looking to God and the religious solution for meaning and identity and significance, we didn't stop needing those things. We just turned to what he calls the romantic solution.

[10:12] He says, We took all our spiritual longings, our need to be validated, to be told we matter, to feel chosen and worthwhile, and we transferred all of that onto other human beings.

So, Becker says, We may have shifted our hopes from a God we no longer believe into human love partners, but ultimately, we still treat those human love partners like gods whose love will justify us as worthy.

Because it's just so deep inside of us, this longing for love. It's so, so deep. And as Becker points out, it's also so, so potentially devastating and destructive.

When we place all our marbles, all our hopes, the whole of our worth, fulfillment, and salvation on other finite, fallible, fickle human beings, it's a recipe for disaster.

And this is exactly what we find here in our passage in Genesis 29, this same longing, the same ache, the same heartbreak that inevitably comes when we place our God-sized hopes on human-sized shoulders that were never meant to bear such weight.

[11:19] So, remember where we are in the book of Genesis. We left off last week with Jacob, right? He's the grandson of Abraham, the grandson of promise, and he just encountered God in a dream.

Right? But as soon as he wakes up here in Genesis chapter 29, he's still in the middle of nowhere. He's still got 400 miles or more to go on foot. It's like walking from here to LA.

He's still unloved by the father he deceived and dishonored. He's still hated and wanted dead by the brother that he cheated. He's still separated from the only person in the entire world who loves him, his mom, Rebecca, whom he will never see again as far as we know.

He's penniless. And even though God promised him in a dream that he would make his offspring like the dust of the earth, this guy is still single. All he's got up to this point is a broken family system, an empty wallet, a long, lonely road ahead, and a promise that he got in a dream.

So by now in Genesis 29, this guy Jacob, he's looking for a break. He's looking for a break. Some sign, some indication that he wasn't just dreaming.

[12:27] And then verse 2, behold, it says in the Hebrew, behold a well. And then again in verse 6, behold a beautiful woman, Rachel. Now in case you're unfamiliar with Jacob's family history, this would have been an unmistakable God moment for Jacob.

Because this woman at the well scene, this woman at the well scene was exactly how Jacob's mom, Rebecca, was discovered. See, years earlier, Abraham, Jacob's grandfather, he sent his servant to go find a wife for Jacob's dad, Isaac.

And so the servant goes, he travels hundreds of miles to a foreign land, and then he stops at a well. And at that well, he prays to the Lord, Lord, show me the woman you've chosen. Let the right woman not only offer me a drink, but go above and beyond.

Do this crazy thing, water all my camels. And that's how I know that this woman is from you. And sure enough, that's exactly what happened. When God brought Rebecca to that well, that's exactly what happened.

And Rebecca became the wife of Isaac, Jacob's mom. So undoubtedly, Jacob had heard this incredible story of how God brought his parents together. And now he's here at this well, and he sees another beautiful woman.

[13:35] And the men at the well tell him that this beautiful girl is even from the same family line as him. This is the daughter of his uncle Laban. And so Jacob is just putting, he's putting all these things together. He's remembering the promise of God.

He's remembering his mom's story. He's staring at this beautiful woman at this well from his family line. And you can just imagine him thinking to himself, this must be it. Finally, finally things are going my way.

The moment I've been waiting for, finally someone to satisfy my longing for love. Someone to love me other than my mom. Someone to make up for the love I never got from my dad or my brother. Someone to prove that I'm not so impossible to love after all. And so Jacob sets all his hope for love upon this woman at the well. And he leaves nothing to chance.

He knows what he wants. He goes all in for it. So, you know, whereas Abraham's servant, he trusts in the Lord. He says a prayer at the well. He asks God to fulfill the promise to Abraham's family.

What we see Jacob do, though, in the next 30 verses, there's not a single mention of the Lord.

[14:38] But only of Jacob doing what he's always done, taking matters into his own hands.

Striving to secure the love he so craves. So while all the shepherds were accustomed to waiting for everyone to arrive around the well and to move the huge stone together so that everyone had a fair chance at watering their flock, Jacob just defies that custom.

Forget that. For his own self-centered ends, he, in a very impressive display of strength, he moves that stone, that huge stone, all by himself. You know, it normally took multiple men, but this guy moves mountains.

He's going to move mountains to secure the love he so craves. Then he waters Rachel's entire flock, and he makes a scene. He kisses her. He weeps out loud in joy.

And when he meets her father, Laban, he works for him for free for a whole month. And then when he's given the opportunity to set his own wages, he goes all in for this love that he craves.

The normal bride price in those days would have been three to four years worth of labor. But Jacob says, I'm going to do seven. I'll work twice as long for Rachel.

[15:49] In his mind, Rachel is it. He must have her. He has to have her. And if that sounds very objectifying to you, it's because it is. It totally is.

Tim Mackey of the Bible Project, he notes that Rachel, Rachel, means lamb. And her sister's name, Leah, means calf. And so when Laban tells Jacob to set his wages, you know, a family member was different than a hired worker.

Family weren't meant to have such cut-and-dry transactional relationships. So basically when Jacob and Laban are talking wages now, setting a bride price, if you read it in the Hebrew, it really sounds like they're transacting over livestock.

How much for this lamb? That's exactly what's happening here. This isn't meant to be a romantic story or the heartwarming tale of a father giving his beloved daughter's hand in marriage.

No, in Laban's mind, he's thinking to himself, how can I get the best deal here? And he sees in Jacob a ton of opportunity. This guy's strong. He moved the stone by himself, right?

[16:47] He knows this guy is driven. He knows he's going to work and that there's nothing he wants more than this daughter of his, Rachel. He knows that Abraham's family has the blessing of God upon it, so he wants proximity to that blessing.

And he sees an opportunity to marry off his less desirable firstborn daughter, Leah. So if you read carefully here in verses 18 and 19, Laban never explicitly says yes to Jacob's offer to work seven years for Rachel's hand in marriage.

But Jacob, he doesn't read the fine print. He's blinded by his longing. And he just gets to work for seven whole years. But because of his desire for Rachel, it is far less duty than delight.

Verse 20 says, it only seemed a few days to him. But not a second after those seven years are up. Jacob's been counting the days, marking his calendar, and he's put in the work.

It's time for him to get his lamb, the piece of meat that he labored for. And what he, this great patriarch of the Jewish faith, says next in verse 21 is something that's made tons of Jewish commentators incredibly embarrassed over the centuries.

[17:52] Literally in the Hebrew, he says this. Give me, and this word give is a very like objectifying word. Like give me a lamb. Give me an object. He says, give me my wife, for I have completed my days. In other words, I've done my time.

You've received your payment. Give me my wife, for I have completed my days, and I will go in to her. And if that sounds crass to you, that's exactly how it sounds in the Hebrew.

Like an animal in heat, Jacob treats his would-be wife like property. Just an objectified answer to his ache for love. But again, Laban's been playing the same game too.

So he throws the customary feast, veils one of his daughters. There's probably a ton of alcohol. And then he sends the veiled bride into Jacob's tent. And in that tent, Jacob believes that the love he always craved is finally about to be fulfilled.

That all his hard work has finally paid off. That this is the beginning of God's blessing and promise to him. It's coming to real life now. So Jacob's there.

[18 : 54] Naked. Vulnerable. Intimate with the one he believes to be the most beautiful person he's ever seen. Jacob thinks to himself, at last. I've secured it.

The blessing. Intimacy with gorgeous Miss Universe trophy wife, Rachel. The love I've always craved. But in the morning, verse 25.

Surprise, surprise. Surprise. Behold, it was Leah. And man, if you're thinking, yo, this Bible story is so cringy. That is exactly how you're supposed to feel.

The Bible doesn't endorse this. It doesn't celebrate this. It's exposing it. It's showing us the wreckage that comes from sin. From objectifying human beings and placing our God-sized hopes upon their frail, fragile shoulders.

The Bible is showing us that these stories aren't about the greatness of the merits of men, but about the greatness of the grace of God. Look, Jacob tried to work his way to secure the promise.

[19 : 56] He tried to work his way to love and to get blessing according to the rules of this world, the rules of meritocracy and transaction and competition. But how'd that turn out for him? See, when we faithlessly forgo the grace of God and insist on playing by everyone else's rules, by the way of works, where the first shall be first and the last shall be last, we will always live under the threat of someone else playing the game better than us.

And it will only ever be a matter of time before we lose to the Labans of this world. Notice how when Jacob wakes up next to Leah and he approaches Laban and says, Why have you deceived me? As soon as that word comes out of his mouth, he realizes what's happened to him. The deceiver's been deceived. It's poetic justice. In the same way that Jacob deceived Isaac in Isaac's tent, in the same way that Jacob took advantage of Isaac's blindness and tricked his father into pouring out his love onto someone he did not intend.

In the same way, Jacob has been fooled by Laban into pouring out his love on someone he did not intend. And whether or not Laban knew that this was going to be the perfect retort in verse 26, he basically says, I don't know about where you come from, Jacob, but here, the older goes before the younger.

This is like a mic drop right here. He might as well have said, Jacob, aren't those the rules you played by when you pretended to be your older brother and stole the firstborn blessing?

[21 : 34] What Laban did was indefensible, but Jacob, Jacob could not ignore that both he and his uncle, they were just playing the same game by the same rules, but Uncle Laban was just playing it a little bit better.

So verse 27 says that eventually, Jacob and Laban made another deal, seven more years for Rachel. So Laban comes out a huge winner, a huge winner, right?

Not only was he able to solve the problem of marrying off his less desirable firstborn daughter, but he also managed to get 14 years of labor basically for this one desirable daughter.

That's a 4X return. It's incredible, 4X return. And Jacob will, at least now he has his beloved Rachel, right? But this isn't the rosy picture of promise.

Verse 30, Jacob made love to Rachel also, and his love for Rachel was greater than his love for Leah, and he worked. The Hebrew word here for worked is *avad*. It's the same as to serve, or the same is connected to the word for slave.

[22 : 34] So he worked, he slaved for Laban another seven years. Functionally, Jacob is almost like a slave to him, all because of his idolatrous pursuit of Rachel's love. And even when Jacob got his supposedly one true love, the one for whom he rolled the stone, the one he worked 14 years to be with, the beautiful woman that he believed would satisfy the craving that he had for love, the one who'd prove once and for all that he wasn't impossible to love, this woman, whom he also expected to fulfill God's promises to make his offspring like the dust of the earth, she's barren.

And their household is now locked in a bitter rivalry between her and her older sister as they share one husband in one household. And Jacob's sin, his idolatry, it just becomes the soil in which the rest of his family's sin will grow.

If you read the rest of Genesis, you'll see that between Joseph and his brothers. And we see it close up here between his wives. Because see, when Jacob objectifies Rachel, treating her as the answer to the ache in his soul, he doesn't just hurt Rachel, but he creates a world in which Leah must now fight for what Jacob already decided she will never have.

Jacob's idolatry shapes his entire household. His fixation on Rachel becomes Leah's prison. His favoritism becomes Leah's lifelong wound. His idolatry becomes Leah's idolatry. His striving becomes Leah's striving. So when Jacob basically communicates to the world that Rachel is worth a whole 14 years to him and Leah is worth nothing to him, Leah is pulled into the same destructive game that Jacob found himself in.

[24 : 22] She's now trying to win the love she so craves from him. So because Jacob has said, if I can just have Rachel, then I'll be loved, Leah now says, well, if I can just have a son for Jacob, then I'll be loved.

You know, for many of us, we can tend to overlook Leah as just some minor tertiary character, just a pawn for her father's schemes, the accidental wife of Jacob, unloved, therefore unimportant, really just a foil to Rachel.

I mean, isn't Rachel the main female lead here, the beautiful one? The desirable one? The heroic barren woman who waited upon the Lord to grant her prayers, to have children? And doesn't the book of Genesis end with Rachel's son, Joseph, saving the whole family, saving the Egyptian empire?

Well, what I've come to realize is that to ignore Leah is to miss out on the very heart of God. To discount Leah's story as insignificant is actually to commit the very same evil against her that her manipulative father and her unloving husband and the whole harsh world committed against her.

So I want us to try to get into Leah's shoes here for a second. Okay, let's try to imagine her experience of this account. So the very first thing we're told about Leah is that she has weak eyes.

[25 : 41] And it's hard to know exactly what that means, but what's clear is that it's a contrast to her beautiful sister, Rachel. Her sister is a bombshell, all right? Now, imagine the shame and agony that she would have felt like her entire life, the day her sister was born, right?

Living in her younger sister's shadow as all the boys drooled over Rachel. Even Jacob, this divinely promised son, you know, son from afar, this prince charming, right?

He wants her. He wants only the younger daughter, not Leah. Especially in a society where a woman's main purpose was to get married and to start a family. This was a terrible, a terrible situation for Leah.

Imagine the village gossip. Just imagine what they were saying. Have you, hey, look at Rachel. Wow, she's gorgeous, right? Have you noticed? Oh, man, what a beauty. Whoever gets to marry her is gonna be so, so lucky.

But what's Laban gonna do about that ugly old first daughter that he's got? How's he gonna marry off Rachel if he can't marry off his first daughter? How's that gonna work? Who's ever gonna wanna marry Leah?

[26 : 52] Who could ever love her? Leah goes her entire life wishing for her own prince charming. Someone to roll a huge stone away for her.

Someone willing to work 14 years for her out of pure delight. Maybe at least just one year, right? But along with the rest of the world, she probably now doubts the day will ever come.

So then imagine this wedding day, right? The day she'd always dreamed would come and yet it's nothing like she dreamed, right? That her father had to trick another man to marry her only confirms to her that even in her daddy's eyes, she is impossible to love.

No one could possibly love the true her. Like Jacob pretending to be in, like Jacob pretending to be Esau in Isaac's tent, she must now pretend to be someone she's not in order to get a small taste of this love that she so craves.

Now imagine her on her wedding night, she's finally held in that tent intimately like she'd always hoped, though never imagined she'd actually experience. But then she hears her partner speak her sister's name.

[27 : 59] I love you, Rachel. And the love she so craves falls short. For in the morning, her husband wakes up shocked, disgusted, no smiles, no good morning kisses, no cuddles, and no regard at all for her feelings.

He hurries out of the tent, angry that he got stuck with her. And the very morning after her wedding night, she watches her husband make a deal to get her younger sister for his second wife.

And now she's stuck, too. For the rest of her life, the husband she thought would finally give her the love she craved validate her as worthy of love. His love is reserved for the one in whose shadow she'd grown up in her entire life.

So Leah is just in this like impossible situation. And her heart should go out to her as this unloved number two wife. And her heart should also go out to her children, who she cannot help but see in light of her woundedness.

With every child that she bears, she bears in reference to her loveless relationship with her husband Jacob. Every child is just a consolation prize for her misery.

[29 : 06] Verse 32, Leah became pregnant and she gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, which sounds like the Hebrew word sea. And she thinks, I've given my husband this firstborn son.

Clearly the Lord has seen my misery. Maybe my husband will finally see me too. Finally love me too. But he doesn't. Then she has another boy, Simeon, which sounds like the word hear.

And she thinks, a second son for my husband. Clearly the Lord has heard that I am hated. That's what it says here in Hebrew, that I am hated. Again, she hopes that maybe my husband will finally hear me too.

Maybe he'll finally love me too. But he doesn't. Then she has a third son, Levi, which sounds like the word attached. And she thinks, a third son. Now surely my husband will at least be attached to me.

Maybe at least love me a little. Nothing changes. Nothing changes. And this is everyone's worst nightmare, right? The nightmare having done our absolute best, achieving every possible goal, and yet finding ourselves still impossible impossible to love.

[30 : 14] Functionally, Leah is the perfect, most excellent, ancient Near Eastern wife. She's super fertile, blessing her husband, enabling him to fulfill the promise of God.

And though she isn't as beautiful as Rachel, which by the way, she has no control over, in every other way that her culture values, Leah's crushing it. Leah's crushing it.

But it's never enough. It's never enough to attain the love she so craves. And I think a lot of us understand this, don't we? Don't you feel what she felt?

None of us may really understand what it means that Leah had weak eyes, but we all have our own version of weak eyes, don't we? These things about us and in our lives that we feel are holding us back, that make us feel less than and impossible to love.

All of us, in one way or another, we're all trying to turn ourselves into a Rachel, hoping to impress, hoping to win and woo the world over with our worthiness.

[31 : 17] But how's that working out for us? How's that working out for any of us? One of my best friends from seminary, she just got married the other week, we were out there in Philadelphia.

I've handed her book to several of you. She's a biblical counselor and she tells this story in her book of this woman who came in to see her for eating disorder. And basically, for this woman, her weak eyes was her weight.

And in order for her to get rid of her weak eyes, become the Rachel that she'd always aspired to be, she had to hit this specific target weight. But then, you know, one summer, she did hit that weight. She got there. She became the Rachel she was trying to be. But then, she began to feel a new anxiety about maintaining the weight. She began to wonder, would I be even more lovely if I lost five more pounds?

And it was like she reached the top of the ladder only to find that there was yet more to climb. So don't you see? The love Leah craved fell short.

[32 : 25] The love Jacob craved fell short. In the end, Jacob and Leah both looked for love, happiness, significance, worth, blessing, and redemption in a love partner, but their partners could not deliver.

For what human could possibly deliver redemption? Ernest Becker recognizes this in his critique of the romantic solution. He writes, how can a human being be a God-like everything to another? No human relationship can bear the burden of Godhood. No human can offer this assurance. We want to be rid of our faults, of our feeling of nothingness. We want to be justified by human partners can't do this.

So where does that leave us? If every human love will eventually fall short, is there something better, something higher, a steadfast love that never ceases and doesn't depend on our appearance or our performance?

You know, after 30 verses in this chapter, finally in verse 31, the Lord appears. The Lord is finally mentioned in the story when the Lord, when Yahweh saw that Leah was hated.

[33 : 30] Even though Jacob saw her as an accident, even though her father saw her as a liability, even though her sister saw her as competition and her community saw her as impossible to love, the Lord saw Leah.

Not as a pawn, not as a mistake, not as a second choice, but as someone worth seeing, hearing, attaching himself to, someone worth loving and honoring.

And for this woman deemed impossible to love by everyone else, God did the impossible through her. Because see, while Genesis, it does end with the triumph of Rachel's son Joseph. He saves the family. He saves the Egyptian empire.

History ends with the triumph of Leah's son, her fourth son, Judah, the tribe that would give birth to Jesus, the Messiah, the very son of God who came not as the son of beautiful, desirable Rachel, but as the son of ugly, unwanted Leah, son of God and of Leah.

And did you know that according to the prophet Isaiah, he had no beauty that we should behold him? And yet it's in this beauty-less son of God, Jesus Christ, that we behold the greatest beauty, the beautiful reality of this passage of Scripture and all of Scripture, that when the love we crave falls short and we feel impossible to love, God's perfect love prevails.

[34 : 52] And that's the gospel. This is the only thing, it's the only thing that can save us. It's the love of God, the only thing that can save us from our striving, the only thing that can liberate us from trying and trying and trying to become Rachel, to win a Jacob.

And this is what Leah finally discovered at the birth of Judah. After striking out three times, after her first three sons, each one named as a kind of trophy, a bid to finally win her husband's heart, then comes verse 35, she conceived again and bore a son and said, this time, I will praise the Lord.

Therefore she called his name Judah, which sounds like praise. Then she stopped having children. See the shift? No mention of Jacob. No more, surely he will love me now.

No more objectifying her babies, seeing them as consolation prizes. No more even trying to conceive at this point. Nothing has changed outside of her. Jacob still prefers Rachel. Her eyes are still weak.

Her home is still broken. But something's changed inside of her. She's come to realize that when the love she craved fell short and when she felt impossible to love, God's perfect love prevailed for her.

[36 : 04] She's realized that, hey, I was laboring for something that maybe God never meant for me to have. With sons number one, two, and three, she was striving. Maybe now, maybe now, maybe now my husband will love me.

But this time, with this son, son number four, this time, she says, no more pining, no more performing, no more proving myself, only praising God.

And isn't that beautiful? Isn't that powerful? Isn't that the liberty that we all actually want to have?

This is the whole reason Chelsea and I named our younger daughter, Leah.

Because we want her to know, she has to know, that when no one seems to love her, when no one seems to see her, or hear her, when no one wants to attach themselves to her, God loves her.

And that's enough. That's enough. Because in Christ, our daughter, all of us, we have a God who's already rolled a stone away for us.

[37 : 12] He's done more than water our flocks. He's given us the entire well, a spring of living water from Him. He's labored for far more than 14 years for us.

The whole of history He's been laboring to redeem us, purchasing us, not with the wage of a shepherd, but with the blood of a lamb, His own blood.

For the joy set before Him, not out of duty, but out of delight, we want little Leah, we want both our girls to know that they don't need to pursue the love of a groom named Jacob to prove that they're lovable.

No, they already have the love of their true, better, perfect bridegroom, Jesus Christ, who is always and ever pursuing them.

And again, this isn't just for my daughters, it's for all of us, for every place in your life where you feel the weakness of your eyes, every place in your life where you're exhausted from trying to turn yourself into a Rachel, for every place in your life where the love you crave falls short again and again and again.

[38 : 20] God wants you to know. He sees you. He hears you. He wants to attach Himself to you because He loves you.

So what's it going to look like to transition from performing to praising? what's it going to look like for us to go from this time I'll try harder, this time I'll try to level up, to know this time I will simply praise the Lord.

I will praise the Lord. God's calling us to name our weak eyes, to confess our Rachel projects, and to join Leah's resolve.

Maybe for you it means to memorize, meditate upon Psalm 103. I love Psalm 103. Speak these words from God into your heart every day. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. Preach the gospel to yourself and tune your hearts to sing His praise because the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases and His mercies really are new every morning, fresh, not stale.

[39 : 33] even if nothing about our circumstances changes, we can choose the pleasure of praise over the pain of performance all day, every day in Christ.

For when the love we crave falls short and we feel impossible to love, God's perfect love will always prevail for us in Christ. Let's pray. Amen.

Lord, help our unbelief. Help us to believe that You offer us everything we could ever want or need in Your love.

Open our eyes to the beauty of Your love, to the power of Your love, to the liberty of Your love, O God. and give us a vision for being a people.

O God, what if all of us, what if the whole world believed that You loved them? Give us that kind of vision, Lord. What if we believed in our anxieties that You loved us, in our insecurities that You loved us?

[40 : 54] How might that change us? How might that change the world? You've shown it to us, Lord. You say it right here. You've sent us Your Son.

O Lord, help our unbelief. Help us to see and savor Your love for us in Christ. We ask that in His name. Amen.