

# PM The Life of Joseph: Birth

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] To think about this this evening, let's turn to the Lord in prayer. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you this evening that we can still gather together.

We thank you this evening that we can still hear from your word. We thank you, Father, that you still speak to us through your word. We confess these are not the situations, it is not the time that we would choose to live through, but it is the time that you have given us.

We confess that left to our own Heavenly Father, we would not choose the current situation we have. And yet, Heavenly Father, we know this evening as we gather that you are the God who is sovereign, that you are the God who is in control of all things, that you are the God who so orders times and seasons.

And so, Father, we pray this evening that you would enable us to rest in you, to rest in your goodness, to rest in your timing. As we come tonight, Father, we want to remember all of those who are in care homes this evening, all of those staff who are perhaps fearful, all of those residents who perhaps don't quite understand what's going on.

May you be near to them. May you be close to them. May you keep your hand of protection and goodness upon them. Remember all of our own congregation this evening who are worried, who are vulnerable, who are perhaps apprehensive.

[ 1 : 2 3 ] May you remind them that you are the God of peace. May you remind them that you are the God who is in control. May you pray again for our government as they make big decisions in the weeks that lie ahead, that you would give them wisdom and insight, that you would give them grace to make the right decisions for the health and for the good and well-being of our nation.

And we pray for ourselves, Father, as we come to your word now, that you would be with us, that you would open your scriptures to us, and may we see the great truths that they hold for us, we ask.

In Jesus' name. Amen. So as I said, we're starting this new series in the life of Joseph, starting this new series this evening in the life of Joseph, and as we come, it will be helpful if you have your Bibles open at Genesis 29.

Genesis 29. And we're going to read and think about verses 31 through to chapter 30 and verse 24. Genesis 29. Beginning to think at verse 31 through to Genesis chapter 30 and verse 24.

There was a program on Channel 4 a good few years ago entitled One Husband, Three Wives. It followed a group of polygamous Mormon believers, who, as the title suggested, had one husband but three wives.

[ 2 : 4 1 ] It was a fascinating show, not even so much from the kind of the carnival, oh look at that, isn't that weird kind of way, but it was a fascinating show to watch the dynamics that were at play within the household and within the different women.

From the outside looking in, it was obvious that the first wife was the wife that the man really loved. It was obvious that the first wife, who he married all those years ago, was the one that he had fallen in love with, the one that he really valued and cherished.

The second and third wives, they were okay. But actually the wife that he really loved was the first one. And the thing that struck me about the program was that I think the women knew that as well.

You see, the first wife, she was quite happy to share her husband with these other two women. She was quite happy for her husband to go off and spend time with these other two women. But the second and third wives, they weren't so keen.

When it was time for someone else to spend time with their husband, they weren't quite so keen. Why? Because at heart, I think they were insecure. Because at heart, I think they knew that their husband really loved the first wife.

[ 3 : 52 ] They knew that their husband was really in love with the first wife. They doubted if their husband really loved them or not. Now it's easy as Christians to get up on our high horse.

And of course, rightly, we defend the sanctity of marriage. Rightly, of course, in these days, we defend the truth that marriage is between one man and one woman for life. But it's easy to get up on our high horse and say, dear, dear, dear, isn't that terrible?

But as we begin this new series on the life of Joseph, as we come to one of the central figures in the Old Testament narrative, what do we see? We see a man who has two wives at the outset, moving to four wives as the narrative progresses.

We see a man who loves one wife and hates the other. We see exactly the same thing as we see in that program. Jacob, Joseph's father, is married to both Leah and Rachel.

Right from the outset, it's clear as we come to Genesis 29, it's clear that Jacob loves Rachel but hates Leah. She had married Leah through the trickery of her father, Laban.

[ 5 : 05 ] We know that Leah has some insecurities around how she looks. But at heart, this section, at heart, this passage is about two things. Firstly, it's about a longing to be loved.

We see that from Leah. We see her longing to be loved and cared for by Jacob. But secondly, it's also about a longing to provide. We see Rachel's insecurity about not being able to have an heir.

We see Rachel's insecurity about not being able to provide a son. And that's her longing throughout this section. Her longing is to provide an heir for her husband. So we want to think about four things this evening.

We see four things together tonight. Firstly, we want to think about a longing to be loved. Secondly, we want to think about a longing to provide. Thirdly, we want to think about a longing to be loved again.

And then fourthly, we'll see a longing fulfilled. A longing fulfilled. So firstly, then, we think about this longing to be loved. A longing to be loved.

[ 6 : 07 ] And we see that in verses 31 through 35 of chapter 29. This opening section, chapter 29, verses 31 through 35. So as we come to this section, then, what do we read in verse 31?

What's the first thing that we see? Verse 31, when the Lord saw that Leah was hid. They aren't too promising, these opening words, are they?

When the Lord saw that Leah was hid. Now, we need to understand why Leah was hid. In some senses, we get the answer in verse 30. The verse just before, the verse that we read.

Verse 30 of chapter 29. So Jacob went into Rachel also. And he loved Rachel more than Leah. And served Laban for another seven years.

Of course, we know the narrative. We understand what's going on here, don't we? We know that Jacob has been tricked into marrying Leah. We know that Rachel, right from the outset of the narrative, we know that Rachel was the one that he really wanted to marry.

- [ 7 : 11 ] He'd been tricked into marrying Leah. And in some senses, he never quite got over that. He hated Leah, but loved Rachel. So as we come to verse 31 then, as we come to the start of the Joseph narrative, right at the outset, it's not a happy home, is it?
- It's not a picture of domestic bliss and happiness. Rachel is loved, but Leah is hated. But notice, please, that the Lord's aware of the situation.
- He's aware of the dynamic within the family. He's aware of what's going on. So what does he do? When the Lord saw that Leah was hated, verse 31, he opened her womb.
- But Rachel was barren. Leah conceives and bears a son. Leah provides this offspring for Jacob. And even the name that Leah gives him is significant.
- Even what she calls this child is significant. She called his name Reuben. Why? For she said, Because the Lord has looked upon my affliction, for now my husband will love me.
- [ 8 : 21 ] Throughout this section, it's going to be a heartbreaking refrain. Throughout this section, it's going to be the constant theme of Leah. For now my husband will love me. Perhaps now my husband will love me.
- Throughout this section, this is all that she wants. She desires her husband's love and affection. She desires Jacob to care for her. Maybe if I provide him a son.
- Maybe if I give him this offspring, then all will be well. Maybe he'll love me. I attended a domestic violence workshop a few years ago now, in association with the Bethany Christian Trust that was run in the Salvation Army Halls.
- And one of the things I think that we can't understand, if you're not in the middle of that situation, one of the things that you can't understand is, why do people stay in those abusive situations?
- Why do people stay in that situation where it's dangerous for them? And part of the answer is what we see here with Leah. They think, well, perhaps if X, Y, or Z happens, then perhaps this person will love me.
- [ 9 : 28 ] Perhaps this person will change. And Leah says, well, maybe if I provide him with offspring, maybe if I give him this heir, maybe if I provide him with this way to carry on the family name, then finally Jacob will love me.
- And notice what happens. Verse 33, she conceives and bears another son. What does she say this time? Because the Lord has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also.
- It's a staggering thing to think about, isn't it? It seems that Leah is acutely aware. It seems that Leah knows in her heart of hearts that Jacob doesn't really like her, that Jacob doesn't really love her, but instead loves her sister, Rachel.
- This is a woman who's acutely aware that her marriage is loveless. It's a warning to those of us who are married that we need to be sure that we're showing our husband or wife, we need to be sure that we're showing our spouse that we love them, that we care for them.
- It might be through the things that we say, it might be through the things that we do, but whatever way that we do it, we need to be sure that our spouses know that we love them, that we care for them. But it's also this evening a word to those of us who aren't married.
- [ 10 : 54 ] You see, the temptation is to think that any marriage is better than no marriage. That having a husband or wife, a spouse of any sort is better than having no spouse.
- And yet this passage reminds us that it's actually infinitely worse to be trapped in a cold, loveless marriage than it is not to be married at all. Verse 34, Leah conceives again.
- And notice what she says, Now this time my husband will be attached to me because I've borne him three sons. I've given him what every Israelite man wants. I've given him the desire of every Israelite man.

I've given him this way to perpetuate his name. I've given him this way to carry on his name. Now surely he will be attached to me. I've given him three sons. Now surely he will love me.

But notice what happens. Verse 35, she conceives again and bears another son. But notice what's changed.

[ 11 : 57 ] Notice what's changed. Verse 35, and she conceived and bore a son and said, This time I will praise the Lord. Therefore she called his name Judah.

What's missing this time? There's no mention of her husband, is there? There's no mention of winning his desire, of winning his affection. There's no mention of her wanting him to love her this time.

She's moved from looking for the desire and affection of her husband to the praise of God Almighty. She's moved from wanting and desiring the praise and love of her husband to praising the Lord God Almighty.

Her priorities have changed. Whether that be through simple kind of, Well, he's never going to love me anyway. So I may as well praise the Lord. Or whether it's become an attitude of heart.

She knows that her husband won't love her. So she goes to the one who will love her. She goes to the Lord. We don't know. Our priorities have changed though. From these first three sons of looking to the love of her husband to the fourth son praising the Lord Almighty.

[ 13 : 03 ] It's a good reminder to us that our chief end is always, our chief end is always to glorify God and enjoy him forever. When we start valuing, when we start looking for the approval of men rather than the approval of God, then we're on a slippery slope.

We need to keep the praise and worship and honor of God front and center in our lives. Then verse 35, Leah ceased bearing.

So that's the first thing that we see in this passage then. We see simply Leah's desire to be loved. She has these three sons and she says, Now, well, surely my husband will love me.

Surely my husband will take notice of me. Surely now my husband will care for me. But of course this evening, friends, we're loved more than we can imagine, aren't we?

We've no need to look for the love of another man or woman. We've no need to look for the approval of another man or woman because in Jesus Christ we have the assurance of the love of God. We have the assurance of the acceptance of God.

[ 14 : 15 ] In Jesus Christ this evening we have been supremely loved. How does that love show itself? How does that love manifest itself? Well, it manifests itself on the cross, doesn't it?

As Jesus comes and lays down his life for us so that we might know the peace of sins forgiven. You see, the love of Jacob was at best imperfect and at worst self-seeking.

But the love that Jesus loves us with this evening is that perfect love that casts out fear. So we see the longing to be loved. Secondly then this evening, we see the longing to provide.

And we see that in verses 1 through 8 of chapter 30. The longing to provide in verses 1 through 8. So if you're keeping score, at the moment the score is Leah 4, Rachel 0.

It seems a bit crass, doesn't it? It seems a bit crude, doesn't it? But in effect, Rachel is keeping score. We see that in verse 1, don't we? And when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister.

[ 15 : 19 ] Now as much as Leah wasn't loved by Jacob, as much as Leah knew that she wasn't loved by Jacob, I think it's probably clear that Rachel does know that she's loved by Jacob. She does know that Jacob values her more than her sister.

Similar idea, I suppose, to what we see in 1 Samuel, isn't it? With Hannah and Penina. Those wives of Elkanah. One knew that she was loved, but couldn't provide any children.

One knew that she probably wasn't loved as much, and yet could provide offspring. But because she doesn't bear any children, because she doesn't provide any offspring, she envied her sister.

And she goes to Jacob and says, look, give me offspring, or I shall die. During this coronavirus crisis, there's been quite a lot of talk, of talk, the message has been hammered home to us, that we're only allowed to leave home for essential reasons.

But then that led to the question, well, what is an essential reason? Is it something that if you don't get it, then you're going to die? It was brought to light because a police force had issued fines to someone for buying Easter eggs.

[ 16 : 26 ] The argument being that an Easter egg wasn't an essential item. Rachel goes to Jacob here and says, look, children are my essential item. If you don't give me a child, if you don't give me an offspring, then I will surely die.

And actually, Jacob's response in verse 2 isn't too bad, is it? What does he say? Look, I'm not God. I haven't withheld the fruit of the womb from you.

In a sense, he says, look, it isn't up to me. There isn't anything that I can do about it. There's nothing really that I can do. But then it all starts to go downhill and it all starts to go downhill quite rapidly, really, doesn't it?

Jacob says, look, verse 2, there's nothing I can do. And then what does Rachel say, verse 3? Well, look, here is my servant, Bilhah. Go into her so that she may give birth on my behalf. Have an heir with this servant.

Have offspring with this servant so that through her I might at least have offspring. Now, Jacob at this point should have said, no, things have gotten out of hand as it is. This rivalry between you and your sister, it isn't good.

[ 17 : 36 ] He should have ignored the advice that Rachel gives him. He should have said, I already have one wife that I don't love. I'm not about to get into having a harem, but he doesn't.

Instead, he takes her, verse 4, as his wife. And Bilhah conceives and bears a son. And Rachel said, what? God has judged me and given me a son.

He has heard my voice and given me a son, verse 6. Not content with that, Bilhah conceives again, so it's obvious that these sexual relations between Jacob and Bilhah are an ongoing thing.

But notice Rachel's attitude. We saw, as we thought about Leah, we saw how, in a sense, Leah's attitude changed, didn't we? We saw how her attitude changed from desiring the love of her husband to praising God.

But notice Rachel's attitude in verse 8. Then Rachel said, with mighty wrestlings, I have wrestled with my sister and have prevailed. Rachel's concern in verse 1 was to get the better of her sister.

[ 18 : 45 ] Rachel's concern in verse 1 was that Leah was conceiving and bearing children and she wasn't. And so by the end of verse 8, now she's saying, well look, I've won. I've emerged victorious. I have bettered my sister.

Through her servant having these children, through her servant having these offspring, she is convinced that she has bettered her sister. And so she calls him Naphtali. Rachel was concerned here not with doing the Lord's will, not with doing what the Lord wanted with her life, but her concern was getting the better of her sister, was getting one up on her sister.

And it's easy for us to fall into the same trap. We want to do better than the church down the road. We want to be more reformed than the church down the road. We want to be thought of better in the community than the church down the road.

We don't want to do the things that God wants us to do with our lives. We don't want to, we're not so much concerned with following God's plan for our lives, but we're concerned with being better than other believers in the area.

We compete with the people of God who are around us. Rather than forming a fellowship, a unity with the people of God around us, we compete and try to put them down. We're concerned that we appear more holy than them.

[ 20 : 03 ] We're concerned that we appear more righteous than them. We're concerned that we keep more rules than them. And yet in reality, our heart can be far from God. Thirdly then, we want to think about this longing to be loved again.

Longing to be loved again. And we see that in verses 9 through 21. This long section verses 9 through 21. We get a sense of that in verse 9.

Don't we again? This longing to be loved, this longing to be useful. When Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children, she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife.

Leah sees that she stopped conceiving. Leah sees that she stopped having children. So she thinks, well, what can I do? She's seen what her sister Rachel has done. And so she says, well, look, I'm going to do the same thing. Rachel has given Jacob one of her servants.

I'm going to give him one of my servants. Here's my servant Zilpah. Again, Jacob should have said, no, again, Jacob should have said, look, this is getting ridiculous.

[ 21 : 11 ] I'm already in enough of a mess without adding more to it, but he doesn't. Leah's servant bears him two sons, Gad and Asher. And what we want to focus on in this section is this bizarre incident with the mandrakes, with the mandrakes.

Reuben, Leah's son, goes and finds these mandrakes in the field and brings them to his mother. Rachel says to her sister, look, please can I have some of these mandrakes? Please can I have some of the mandrakes that your son found?

But Leah says, verse 15, well, look, you've taken away my husband. You've already taken away that thing that's precious to me. Are you going to take away my son's mandrakes as well? Are you going to take away the hard work of my son?

She's basically saying, look, you've taken everything I have and you're not going to take my son's mandrakes as well? And they engage in a trade.

Well, look, you can have him tonight. You can lie with him tonight in return for some of the mandrakes. Hardly speaks of a loving, happy home, doesn't it?

[ 22 : 12 ] Hardly speaks of a picture of domestic bliss. In some senses, Jacob is a commodity that can be traded back and forth. The program that we talked about at the start, this program, three wives, one husband, had a rota.

All of the women had a rota as to whose turn it was to be with the husband on any particular evening. If there were special events like anniversaries or birthdays or things like that, then the husband could be traded, the rota could be changed so that the husband could be with that particular wife.

And that's what happens here, isn't it? Rachel trades away Jacob in return for some of the mandrakes. Jacob comes home from harvesting the feed and Jacob comes home from his work and Leah goes out to meet him.

She says, look, I know this is a bit strange, I know this is a bit unusual but you must come and lie with me this evening because I've traded some of my son's mandrakes for you. But notice what happens.

God listened to Leah and she conceived and bore another son. But even then that isn't it finished because Leah goes on to have another son.

[ 23 : 25 ] Notice what she says. Verse 20. Then Leah said, God has endowed me with a good endowment. Now my husband will honor me because I've borne him six sons.

Behind all of this from Leah's perspective, behind trading the mandrakes, behind laying with her husband, is this desire to be loved. A desire to be cherished by her husband.

A desire to be well thought of by her husband. But as we said earlier, if you're looking for human love to sustain you, if you're looking for human love to give you value and purpose, then you're looking in the wrong place.

The place to look this evening is the cross of Jesus Christ. It's there where we see how much we're supremely loved. It's there where we see the grace of God poured out on us. It's there we see Jesus Christ dying not when we were particularly lovely, not when we had any thought for God, but that when we were sinners, Christ died for us.

That's love, friends. And that's where we need to look this evening. Fourthly, finally, and quickly, we want to think then about a longing fulfilled, a longing fulfilled, and we see that in verses 22 through 24.

[ 24 : 45 ] So at the moment, the score on the door is Leah 6, Bilhah 2, Zilpah 2, Rachel still 0. But then we get to verse 22. God remembered Rachel.

God listened to her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son and she called his name Joseph. The longing to bear a son, the longing to produce offspring, the longing to have an heir with Jacob has finally been fulfilled in this boy Joseph.

All of us this evening have a longing built into us. It may not be the longing for marriage, it may not be the longing for children, but all of us this evening have a longing built into us.

All of us this evening have a longing built into us for home. All of us this evening have a longing built into us for God. Until we find God, until we find peace with God, until we find right relationship with God, that longing will never be fulfilled.

That longing can only be found in the Lord Jesus Christ. Until we find our home in heaven, until we find that longing met in heaven, then we'll never be satisfied.

[ 25 : 57 ] You see, Rachel here isn't satisfied, is she? Verse 24, she called his name Joseph, saying, May the Lord add to me another son. This one son wasn't enough. This one son didn't satisfy her.

She wanted another. And however much we advance, however far we advance in our career, however much success we have, however much fame we might have, it will never be enough to satisfy us.

It will never be enough to make us restful. Because we'll always be restless until we find rest with God. Why have we spent so long thinking about this narrative this evening?

Why have we spent so long thinking about this narrative whenever Joseph figures so little in it? Well, it's key that we understand this section of Genesis because it sets the theme, it sets the tone for the rest of the life story of Joseph.

It explains why he's the favourite because he was born to Rachel. It explains the tension that exists then between the brothers because they're acutely aware that their mother wasn't loved by their father.

[ 27 : 02 ] They're acutely aware of their status as underbrothers. It explains the tensions that exist within the family. It explains the tensions that exist between the mothers.

But as we see the life of Joseph progress, as we come in the coming weeks to think about the different aspects of the life of Joseph, we'll see how God takes this messy beginning, this very messy beginning, and achieves great things with it.

He does great things even from the humblest of beginnings. Amen. All right. All right.

So... Oof. Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 28 : 48 ] Thank you.

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[ 31 : 18 ] Thank you.

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[ 33 : 48 ] Thank you.

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[ 36 : 18 ] Thank you.

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[ 38 : 48 ] Thank you.

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[ 41 : 18 ] Thank you.

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