

Life in a Difficult Family

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. Our scripture reading this morning will be taken from the book of Genesis.! We'll begin at verse Genesis chapter 29, beginning at verse 31.

! On Genesis 31 through 24.!

He opened a womb, but Rachel was barren. And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben. For she said, because the Lord has looked upon my affliction, for now my husband will love me.

She conceived again and bore a son and said, because the Lord has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also. And she called his name Simeon.

Again she conceived and bore a son and said, Now this time my husband will be attached to me, because I have borne him three sons. Therefore his name was called Levi.

[1 : 1 0] And she conceived again and bore a son and said, This time I will praise the Lord. Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she ceased bearing.

When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister. She said to Jacob, Give me children or I shall die.

Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel and he said, Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb? Then she said, Here is my servant Billa.

Go into her so that she may give birth on my behalf, that even I may have children through her. So she gave him her servant Billa as a wife, and Jacob went into her.

And Billa conceived and bore Jacob a son. Then Rachel said, God has judged me and has also heard my voice and given me a son. Therefore she called his name Dan.

[2 : 1 5] Rachel's servant Billa conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. Then Rachel said, With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister and have prevailed.

So she called his name Napphali. When Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children, she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife.

Then Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. And Leah said, Good fortune has come. So she called his name Gad. Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son.

And Leah said, Happy am I, for women have called me happy. So she called his name Asher. In the days of wheat harvest, Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah.

Then Rachel said to Leah, Please give me some of your son's mandrakes. But she said to her, Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son's mandrakes also?

[3 : 2 0] Rachel said, Then he may lie with you tonight in exchange for your son's mandrakes. When Jacob came from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, You must come into me, for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes.

So he lay with her that night. And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. Leah said, God has given me my wages, because I gave my servant to my husband.

So she called his name Issachar. And Leah conceived again, and she bore Jacob a sixth son. Then Leah said, God has endowed me with a good endowment.

Now my husband will honor me, because I have borne him six sons. So she called his name Zebulun. Afterward, she bore a daughter, and called her name Dinah.

Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her, and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son, and said, God has taken away my reproach. And she called his name Joseph, saying, May the Lord add to me another son.

[4 : 30] Here ends our scripture reading for today. Thank you very much, David. Well, this morning, after a seven-month break, we are returning to our sermon series in the book of Genesis.

If this is your first time joining us this morning in this series, or you've missed some of the sermons in this series, they're all on the website. You can find them there.

The last time we left off at the point where Jacob's uncle, Laban, had deceived him. Jacob thought he was marrying Rachel, and Laban deceived him, and instead gave him Leah.

And Laban offered Jacob a deal. He said, Okay, if you would work for me, agree to work for another seven years, then I will give you Rachel also.

And Jacob loved Rachel, and so he agreed. After the seven days of celebrating the wedding of Leah, Rachel became his wife, and he worked for Laban for another seven years.

[5 : 44] This section of Genesis that we come to this morning gives us an account of what happened during those seven years. The seven years of working for Rachel and being married to these two sisters.

And what we see is that Jacob's family was complicated. His family was difficult. That's to put it mildly. He starts out with two rival wives who are sisters.

And by the end of Genesis, this account, he has two additional wives who were former slaves of his two wives. And between his four wives, he fathers 11 sons and a daughter.

Later, he will father a 12th son, Benjamin. In chapter 35. From this account, again, we're able to see that this was a difficult family to live in.

And we're really just seeing it from the perspective of the father and the mothers. We're not seeing it from the perspective of the children, but we could imagine what was going on with the children because we can see that one son, Reuben, is old enough to go into the field and harvest and bring things back.

[7 : 02] And so the children had their own lives going on, but we don't see that yet. Then what we see is this was a dysfunctional family. This was a broken family.

And this is a very sad account. And I think it begs the question, why did the sovereign, all-knowing, all-wise, all-powerful God choose to fulfill his purpose to build a nation through relationships that came about through deceit, scheming, rivalry, jealousy, selfishness, and even sexual exploitation?

Why did the sovereign, all-wise, all-powerful God choose to work through these relationships? Before I answer that question, let me remind you that when we started this sermon series, we pointed out that Moses wrote the book of Genesis when the children of Israel were coming out of Egypt, they were going into the Promised Land, and Moses was writing a history not just of how the world came to be, but he was writing a history about how the nation of Israel came to be, how the twelve tribes came to be, how these people who were coming out of Egypt, what their ancestry was, what the background was, because they'd lost it through some 400 years of slavery.

And so in this account, Moses gives the account and the history of the dysfunctional family of Jacob and how the twelve tribes came into being.

And you wonder, why wasn't enough, why wasn't it enough for Moses to simply say, Jacob had twelve sons by four wives, and that's how we got these twelve tribes of Israel?

[9 : 10] Why do we have to go into the gory details and air all the dirty family laundry of deception and scheming and trickery and wife rivalry and jealousy and selfishness and again, even sexual exploitation?

Well, Moses didn't just decide that on his own. Moses just didn't decide, well, I'm going to give them all the details. As with the rest of Scripture, Moses, like all the other authors of Scripture, was inspired by God to write what he wrote.

What Moses wrote, God wanted written. these details of this dysfunctional family and the airing of all of their dirty laundry was the Lord's doing.

He inspired Moses to write what he wrote. And here's why the all-sovereign, all-knowing, all-wise, all-powerful God chose to fulfill his promise to build a nation by using relationships that came about in such a twisted and sordid way.

He did it to show that God works in and through the lives of fallen people bringing his purposes to pass. That's why he had him to do it.

[10 : 48] He wanted Israel to see and he wants us to see that despite our brokenness, despite our dysfunction, despite some of the worst tragedies that we could experience in our lives and in our families, God is at work fulfilling his purposes and his plans.

And brothers and sisters, this should encourage us. this should encourage us because we are all fallen people. We're all broken people. And to one degree or another, we've all come from dysfunctional families and we are all in dysfunctional families because of sin.

There's not a descendant of Adam. There's not a family connected to the line of Adam who has not been affected by sin and broken by sin.

And this account is in our Bibles to encourage us. God doesn't need to hide the gory details of the lives of the people he worked in.

He shares them that we would be encouraged. That in the same way that he worked in this dysfunctional family, he works in our families as well.

[12 : 17] And I want us to consider that this morning. But first let me pray for us. Father, we are so grateful that we are gathered in this place this morning.

Thank you, Lord, for the ways that you have already spoken to our hearts. And I pray, Lord, that in every heart, present or watching, there would be an assurance, a witness, a conviction that you have brought us to this moment to hear what you will say to us.

Lord, we thank you that you are able to work your plans and your purposes in and through broken people and dysfunctional families.

And God, I pray that you would cause each of us to hear in our particular circumstances circumstances in which we find ourselves.

Let's speak to our hearts, direct our way, and be glorified in all that is said and done.

[13 : 33] We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. In the midst of all the sinful conduct that we see in this passage before us, I think what's important for us to see is that the grace of God was at work in the midst of it all.

In the midst of all of these gory details, in the midst of these shameful things that happened in the family of Jacob, God was at work by his grace in the midst of it all.

And so this morning I want to draw attention to the grace of God at work in this passage and in these people's lives in three different ways. The first way is the grace of God to Jacob.

I think it's important that we start with Jacob because despite the sinful conduct that we see in this account, God was fulfilling his purpose that he had made, a promise that he had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that he was going to create a great nation out of them.

And in the case of Jacob, what we see is that God fulfilled this promise by giving him children, giving him the children that he gave him. Not because of who Jacob was, but despite who Jacob was.

[15 : 12] God gave him these children. God fulfilled this promise in his life, not because of who he was, but in spite of who he was. It wouldn't surprise me if there are some of us this morning who have actually changed our minds or canceled some promises that we made, because some of the people we made the promises to didn't live up to some expectation we had of them.

And that's the way we are. We are that way. But God is in that way. God made these promises and in spite of Jacob, God fulfilled his promises.

In this account before us, we see Jacob as a married man now, living with his uncle Laban in Paddan Aram, previously we saw him as a single man living in the land of Canaan with his parents, Isaac and Rebekah, and with his twin brother, Esau.

And the reason Jacob finds himself in Paddan Aram is he fled there for his very life. His brother wanted to kill him because he stole his brother's blessing from his father, Isaac.

What is clear is that despite the hardships that Jacob went through, having to flee the land that he called home to spare his life, Jacob remained hard-hearted and he remained a selfish man.

[16 : 47] First we see how he treats his first wife, Leah. Jacob did not love Leah. He was tricked into marrying her. He loved Rachel. Rachel. But Jacob's heart was really not exclusively for Rachel.

If his heart was exclusively for Rachel, if he loved Rachel exclusively, alone, single-heartedly, he would not have continued to have sexual relations with Leah after he took Rachel as a wife.

but he continued to have sexual relations with her, even though we're told two times he hated her in this passage.

And yet, he continued to have sexual relations with her, and what it amounted to was him simply using her for his own personal gratification, even though he didn't love her.

And what's clear from this passage is God wasn't pleased. Despite the fact that he was tricked into marrying Leah, God expected him to treat Leah better than he did.

[18 : 03] This is very clear from verse 31 in chapter 29. Look again at what it says. When the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren.

Jacob's desire was certainly for Rachel, whom he loved, to get pregnant, not Leah. And so the Lord demonstrated his disapproval of how Jacob was treating Leah by sovereignly opening Leah's womb and sovereignly closing Rachel's womb.

And so we see Jacob's hard-heartedness and his selfishness in his bad treatment of his first wife, Leah. love. We also see that Jacob was heartless and even lacked compassion for Rachel, whom he claimed to love.

In verse 1 of chapter 30, Rachel is in great anguish and she wants a child. She wants a child desperately because her sister, who she's competing with, has four sons and she wasn't getting pregnant.

And she said to Jacob, give me children or I shall die. And look at Jacob's response in verse 2.

[19 : 24] Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel and he said, am I in the place of God who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?

And really behind Jacob's anger, he was saying something to Rachel like, look, the problem is not with me, the problem is with you. I have four sons, I've fathered four sons with your sister, so you're the one who can't get pregnant and God is the one who's closed your womb, so what does it have to do with me?

Jacob showed no compassion to his wife Rachel, whom he claimed to love. And he also demonstrated weak, ungodly leadership by speaking to Rachel in that way.

He would have known, I'm sure the story would have been told to him. Remember back in Genesis 25, when Rebecca wasn't getting pregnant, what did his father Isaac do? He cried out to the Lord and prayed to the Lord and the Lord gave her two sons, one of whom was Jacob.

Jacob shows himself as a weak, uninvolved, selfish, indifferent, hard-hearted husband who could care less for what his wife was going through and pointed her to God but did not even petition the Lord for her predicament.

[20 : 53] husband. And we see Rachel's response in the midst of her desperation. We see it in verses three to eight. She decides that she is going to take her slave villa and she is going to give her to Jacob as another wife, now his third wife, and she says, I'm going to get children through my slave.

She takes a page out of her grandmother in law's book, Sarah, who did the same thing with her servant Hagar.

She gives Bella to Jacob and without thought, without consideration, he just takes on another wife and he fathers two children with her. He thought nothing of doing it.

In verses 14 to 18, we see Jacob in perhaps the lowest moment of his life. the baddest optics that you could imagine we see about Jacob in verses 14 to 18.

Jacob knowingly goes along with a scheme that amounts to prostitution. He allows Rachel, who was the queen, even though she was the second wife, he allowed her to be the queen controlling everything, and he allows her to trade with Leah one night of sleeping with him for some mandrakes, a plant that was commonly believed to enhance fertility in women and to cause them to get pregnant.

[22 : 36] Leah plainly told Jacob, I hired you with my son's mandrakes for the night, and Jacob passively and selfishly and godlessly went along with that plan, knowing that that was a sordid scheme.

He did it with his eyes wide open. It wasn't like the wool was pulled over his eyes like when he married Leah. No, she told him right up front, you're going to sleep with me because I paid for you with my son's mandrakes.

In this account before us, as we assess Jacob's conduct as a husband and as a father, what we see is a passive, selfish man who cared about no one else but himself.

And this is consistent with all that we saw with Jacob. He didn't care about relations with his brother. He didn't care that if he stole his brother's birthright, that he and his brother would be ripped apart.

He didn't care. We see that it continues. He is passive. He was aware of the rivalry and the struggle going on between these two sisters who were his wives.

[23 : 53] He understood the rivalry, the way they named their children. They named their children in ways that pointed to the rivalry between them. And he did nothing.

He was a dysfunctional husband and he was a dysfunctional father. And yet, in the midst of all of Jacob's sinful conduct, in the midst of all of his passivity, God was graciously at work fulfilling the promise that he had made over three generations to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that he was going to raise up a great nation from among them.

And what God did for Jacob by blessing him with sons who had become a great nation, it was all by grace. It was all by grace.

Not because of who Jacob was, but again, despite who he was. God was at work for his own glory, bringing his purposes to pass in the life of a sinner.

But not just any sinner, a sinner of his own choosing. God chose Jacob and he did it knowingly, his eyes were wide open.

[25 : 19] He chose this undeserving, selfish man to bear these sons who would be this great nation.

What we see is that God didn't deal with Jacob according to what his sins deserved. And brothers and sisters, that's true for all of us. And thank God he doesn't deal with us according to what our sins deserve.

Because if he did, none of us would make it. If he did, all of us would be toast. Toast. God's grace to Jacob.

Which brings me to my second point, God's grace to Jacob's wives. First, let's consider God's grace to Leah.

I think it's important to start by saying that Leah shared some of the blame for the predicament that she was in. She went along with the scheme to deceive Jacob into marrying her.

[26 : 31] Yes, in that culture she would have been very much expected to obey her father and be under his authority, but she could have, there were consequences, but she could have refused to go along with the scheme that her father had involved her in.

So, Leah was not fully innocent from the situation that she found herself in, in a marriage where she wasn't loved, and she was hated by her husband, hated by her sister.

She was partly responsible, and therefore, she made up her bad heart. And I'm sure some of us could remember our parents especially saying, when you make up your bad heart, you lay down hard.

But you know what? God didn't look at Leah that way. God didn't say, well, you went ahead, and you went along with that. You deceived Jacob, and so now, you're reaping what you've sown.

No, instead, God was merciful towards Leah. God was compassionate towards Leah. Even though her husband's eyes were not upon her, even though her sister hated her, God's eyes were upon Leah, even though she was unloved by them.

[27 : 54] And that's what we see in verse 31 of chapter 29. The Lord saw that Leah was unloved by Jacob, and he had compassion on her, and he opened her womb to give her what all married women in that day in particular would have longed for, children, and especially sons.

That's what we see in verse 31 of chapter 29. God first gives her a son, whom she names Reuben, saying, see a son.

And the idea is, see a preferred child. In those days, they preferred sons over daughters, because sons carried on the family name in particular.

children. But what's sad when we consider what was going on with Leah is that more than having a son or children, Leah desired the love of Jacob.

You see in verse 32 that she attributes this son as having been given to her by God, son. But more than focusing on God who gave her the son, Leah was preoccupied with what became an idol in her life, which was winning the love of her husband.

[29 : 27] Notice in verse 32 that Leah thought having this son would result in her husband loving her.

She says, now my husband would love me. And the sad truth is Jacob still didn't love her. We see in verse 33 she conceived again and bore another son and she acknowledged that God was the one who gave her this son and she named him Simeon, meaning heard.

God has heard. He's heard that I'm hated, so he's given me a son. Again, she's referencing her husband whose love she desperately wants.

In verse 34 we're told Leah conceived and brought forth a third son. And again she's longing for the love of her husband. She says, this time my husband's going to be joined to me.

And so she names him Levi, which means joined or attached. And again her hope is dashed. She doesn't win the love of Jacob.

[30 : 40] Not even with three sons does Jacob's love turn towards her. And she's named these sons in vain with a false hope that he will eventually love her.

Verse 35, Leah conceives yet again, and she bears a fourth son. And finally her attention turns away from her husband Jacob and the love she wants on him and she names this son Judah and she says, this time I'm going to praise the Lord.

This is where God wants her to be. She directs her attention now to the Lord. And we see God's kindness with Leah. He was patient with her.

He had compassion on her in her very vulnerable state of being hated by her husband and hated by her sister. He looked upon her misery and had compassion on her.

God favored her over Rachel. And it's important to note that God sovereignly chose Leah to be a two very special sons.

[31 : 52] who would be the leaders of two tribes, Judah and Levi. Levi, well, first Judah is the son and the tribe from whom the Lord descended.

It was the kingly tribe in the nation of Israel. And Levi was the priestly tribe. They were the ones who attended to the tabernacle and all the sacrifices that the Lord had instituted.

The entire Levitical priesthood that pointed to Jesus came through Leah. God was working out his purposes in the midst of Leah's misery, in the midst of the hatred that she was experiencing from Jacob and from her sister Rachel.

Well, we see that Rachel was jealous that she had not born any children for Jacob and her sister Leah had born four children, four sons.

And rather than pray to God, what we see her doing in verse one of chapter 30 is she's complaining to her husband, give me children or I'm going to die. And rather than wait for God, wait for his timing, trusting him, again she did with her mother-in-law, her grandmother-in-law, Sarah did, and she decided to have a child another way.

[33 : 28] She decided to take Madison to her own hands. And she says, I'm going to let my slave have a child, have children, and they're going to be my children because she is my slave.

And Bella bore her two sons in this manner. And she named them, Rachel named them Dan and Naphtali. And although these two sons were born by Bella, they were taken as Rachel's children and accounted for her children.

And we're able to see how out of touch Rachel really was. Rachel was far from the Lord. Her mind was far from God and the things of God. And we see it in how she misinterprets these children that she gets through Bella.

In verse six, she says, God has vindicated me. And so she named Bella's first son Dan, which means vindication. This is God vindicated me.

And then verse eight, she invokes the name of God again, where she says, I've wrestled with God and I've wrestled against my sister and I've overcome. And therefore, she named the second son through Bella, Naphtali.

[34 : 45] And she involved God in what God was not involved in, in terms of her scheming, although he was still working his purposes in the midst of it.

And this is one of the repeated truths that we see in the Bible, that God works in the midst of human sin.

God works his plans and his purposes in the midst of human sin, although he is not the author of sin. And he cannot be charged with sin. And Rachel misinterprets having these two children as a result of her scheme.

sin. But in it, God was again at work. He takes this marginalized, exploited slave and includes her in the building up of the nation of Israel.

Someone who would have been an outsider, an outcast. The sovereign Lord brings her in, working in the midst of Rachel's sin. And she's a part of building up this nation.

[36 : 07] Back to Leah, we notice that Leah now is moved with jealousy. She sees that her sister has had these two other children through her slave, and so she gives her slave, Zilpah, to Jacob as a wife.

Jacob thinks nothing about it, and he takes on a fourth wife. And we can see the sovereignty of God in the midst of all this. God permitted both of these slave women to have two children each.

And we shouldn't miss that this is sexual exploitation. This is these two sisters taking these two women, slaves they were, but forcing them into sexual relations with Jacob.

ignoring their dignity, ignoring their humanity, and treating them in this particular way. And Zilpah's first son, Leah names him Gad, which means good luck.

The second son, she names Asher, which he says, happy, I'm happy, the women are going to call me happy. And we are able to see the change even in Leah.

[37 : 21] Leah's mind, she's almost become a secular humanist. She's no longer attributing the names of these children to God, but she's simply saying, well, this is just good luck.

And now women are going to call me happy, because I am happy. But the truth is, she wasn't happy. Leah was masking happiness.

She wasn't happy because what she wanted was she wanted the love of her husband. She decided when she had a fourth child that she was now going to praise the Lord.

But it didn't last. And this is what verses 14 to 21 reveal. in verses 14 to 18, we see the worst of this rivalry between these two sisters.

Leah's son, Reuben, goes out, he's harvesting wheat, and he comes across these mandrakes. And as I said earlier, mandrakes in that culture were believed to increase fertility in women, they could have children.

[38 : 41] Now, what is clear is obviously it was a very rare kind of plant. Because if it was in abundance, everybody can go and get their own, but it was not in abundance, and you seem to only come upon it on occasion.

And so Reuben obviously knew he took it to his mother, and somehow Rachel becomes aware, and she says to Leah, give me some of your son's mandrakes.

And Leah says to her, sounds like a real bohemian, it ain't enough for you to take my husband, you want to take my son's mandrake too. And Rachel, being in the position of driver's seat, and knowing that her sister longed for the love of Jacob, she says, okay, I'll make you a deal.

And notice the deal that she makes. She doesn't say, I'll let you sleep with Jacob tonight. Only one night. There was a one-night stand. There wasn't beyond that.

She said, tonight, you could sleep with him. But she didn't say, for some of the mandrakes. She took all the mandrakes. At first, it was, give me some. And then she said, no, she says, okay, I will trade the mandrakes.

[39 : 58] Give me the mandrakes. You have one night with my husband. And what was going on there, so you have these two discontented women. One who has children but wants love.

And one who has love but wants children that she doesn't have. And they're both trading for what they want. Leah wasn't thinking, I don't think that, really, I want to sleep with Jacob because I want another child.

No, she was thinking, even if she wanted that other child, it was a means to an end to get her husband's love. And so they go through this very assorted transaction of prostituting this common husband that they had.

And the interesting thing is this. Leah, who didn't have the mandrakes, she gets pregnant. But she gets no love.

Genesis ends, and we never see a hint that Jacob loved Leah. As a matter of fact, beyond this point, Leah is just mentioned in passing.

[41 : 11] And what we see is Rachel, who took all the mandrakes, still didn't get pregnant. Their schemes still didn't work.

No love and no children. But God still does something remarkable.

God gives Leah a fifth son. And she names him Issachar. Again, the name and the reason she says she names this son Issachar, she says, God rewarded me for giving my servant to Jacob.

God rewarded me for doing that. And she's so far off from the Lord and from his ways. And she misinterprets what the Lord does.

As I was preparing, I couldn't help but remember a time when David and I did prison ministry and there was a guy that we knew at the prison.

[42 : 22] Some of you, I'm sure, have heard me tell this story. And in the section of the prison that we were in, guys had done it all. All kinds of hardened criminals.

And he said to me, he said, Pastor Morrissey, you see me, I like these guys, you know. He said, I didn't rape nobody, I don't murder, and me, I do little petty tough.

I break in a car here, break in a house just to support my habit, but I don't do nothing big. And one thing with me, Pastor Morris, whenever I break in a house or a car, before I do it, I just pray.

And he was serious. He said, I pray, Lord, don't let me get catch.

And if I get catch, Lord, don't let them beat me up, let them call the police. He said, Pastor Morris, God always answer that prayer. say, sometimes I don't get catch, but when they catch me, they never beat me up, they call the police.

[43 : 31] That's like Rachel, that's like Leah. Misunderstanding the kindness and the goodness of the Lord, just having mercy on him, believing that God is involved in his scheme and in his crimes, and God is helping him.

Brothers and sisters, how many times have we misunderstood the goodness of the Lord. Sometimes in our sin, sometimes in our disobedience, God is working out his purposes, God is fulfilling his plans in our lives, and we misinterpret that to believe that there's some approval in what we're doing.

But it is the sheer mercy and grace of God that we are experiencing. In verse 19, we see that she has a sixth son.

Leah bears a sixth son to Jacob, and she names him Zebulun, which means honor. And again, everything is turned to her now. My husband is now going to honor me.

She still has this desire for the love of her husband. Now that I've borne him six sons, he has to honor me now. And again, Genesis ends without any evidence that Leah was ever able to win the love of Jacob.

[44 : 50] In verse 21, we see that the Lord even gives her a daughter. Gives her daughter. After all these sons, gives her a daughter, and I think men know that daughters are special to the hearts of fathers in particular, but again, she remained unloved.

Leah remained unloved by Jacob. What is important for us to see is that God was gracious to Leah, and God chose her to contribute the most in the largest measure to the building up of the house of Israel.

And that's the way it is in life, brethren. God's heart is towards the marginalized. God's heart is towards those who are abused. God's heart is towards those who are not countenanced in the world.

But while God clearly favored Leah over Rachel, this account that Moses gives us ends telling us in verse 22, God remembered Rachel.

God remembered Rachel. God listened to her and opened her womb. And what we see here is Rachel obviously had come to a point where she put aside her scheming, where she wasn't looking to Jacob anymore to give her children, where she wasn't trying to bring this about by herself, but she was praying to God and she was waiting on God and Moses tells us God remembered Rachel in verse 22.

[46 : 39] God listened to her and opened her womb. And what we see is the humble name that she gives to this son.

She names him Joseph and it means may the Lord add to me another son. It was a prayer, God add to me another son.

I'm not going to try to get it through taking mandrakes. I'm not going to get it through giving my slave to Jacob. God would you add to me another son?

And later we'll see in chapter 35 that the Lord did answer that prayer for Rachel. God gave her another son, Benjamin, the last son of Jacob.

in the case of Jacob's two slave wives, we're able to see that even though they were mistreated by Leah and Rachel, we can still see God's grace to them because in the process of the mistreatment they moved from being slaves to being wives.

[47 : 56] Now they would not have had the same status as Rachel and Leah, but they were wives nonetheless. And that was better than being a slave. It doesn't justify the sexual exploitation that they experienced, but I think in our broken and fallen world, if you gave a slave the choice, a female slave that is, of becoming a surrogate wife, becoming a subordinate wife to a man, or remaining a slave at the whim and fancy of his wives, I think most female slaves would choose being a wife under those conditions because the reality is that if you remain a slave, you could still be exploited.

You could still be taken advantage of. You're still very, very vulnerable. people. But God's grace to these two women who were slaves was that he included them in his plan of redemption.

He included them in this plan of redemption that he was working out in the nation of Israel that they helped to build up the nation of Israel. So God was at work in the midst of this sordid affair, this scandalous family, this dysfunctional family.

He was at work creating a nation from it in the midst of all the sin, in the midst of all the undesirable conduct that we see.

We see God's heart for the marginalized and the mistreated. We see God's mercy and grace even when our own sin contributes to the predicament that we find ourselves in.

[49 : 59] So that's God's grace to Jacob and that's God's grace to Jacob's wives. The third and final point this morning is not directly in the passage, but it's an implication of the passage.

And the implication is that from this passage where we're able to see God's grace to Jacob and God's grace to Jacob's wives in their dysfunctional family, we should be able to see God's grace to us in our dysfunctional families.

This is my third and final point, God's grace to us. It's quite amazing that so many people believe that they must earn or deserve everything that they get from God.

There are a lot of people who believe that and I'm not talking about unbelievers, talking about believers. believers. You ask the average Christian, how are we saved?

They say, we're saved by grace. But if you were to observe their lives, observe how they approach their relationship with the Lord, it says we're saved by works.

[51 : 25] We're saved by doing what will please the Lord and appease the Lord and cause them to do for us what he does.

There are many people who believe that it is our own work, our own merit that causes God to be favorable towards us.

brothers and sisters, God does not deal with us according to what our sins deserve.

And no sin of ours can thwart any purpose of God that he has for our lives. No sin. God's grace is far greater than our greatest sin.

And if any sin of yours or mine is able to change or thwart the purpose of God that puts us in our sin above God. And I don't say this to us this morning to cause us to be arrogant or to cause us to be careless and sloppy in living our lives.

[52 : 51] We are called to holiness. Brothers and sisters. We are called to seek to love the Lord with all of our heart, with all of our strength, with all of our minds.

But the reality is that even as we seek to do that, we are going to fail. We're going to sin in different ways and to different degrees. love the things. And God will remain merciful to us.

He will love us as much in our failure as he does on our best day. And he will be as determined to work in our lives in the moment of our failure as much as he is on our best day.

His plans and purposes don't change. His plans and purposes are not paused. He does it not because of us but in spite of us, in spite of who we are and what we do.

And rather than motivating any of God's children to believe that this is licensed to go and live carelessly and sin, no, it should do the opposite.

[54 : 05] It should cause us to fall on our faces in worship before a holy and merciful God whose love is steadfast towards us.

His love never changes, never wanes, never surprised, and is strong enough to endure the worst that can become of us.

The five characters in this account, three active and two passive, active. The active ones are Jacob, Leah, and Rachel.

The passive ones are Billa and Zilpah. Jacob was passive and selfish and hard-hearted. Leah was deceptive and hated and mistreated and marginalized by her own family.

She idolized the love of her husband. Rachel was arrogant and cold-hearted and idolized bearing children. And Billa and Zilpah were powerless slaves whom nobody regarded, who were abused.

[55 : 24] And I suspect that some of us, hopefully most of us, could identify with one or more of these individuals.

And the one thing that they all have in common is that despite all the dysfunction and sin in their lives, God was working out his purpose still through their lives.

Maybe you don't identify with any of them, but however you identify yourself, here's what I know. I know that as a descendant of Adam, your life is also broken and also fallen and also dysfunctional in different ways.

And so is your family and so is all of our families. But the good news is that God still works his purposes in and through our lives.

And our worst dysfunction can't change it. Our worst dysfunction will not change it. And I think in some ways we have to think in an opposite way.

[56 : 41] Sometimes we think if we're just good enough, God could use us. But I think when you look at passages like this, it's almost as if you need to be bad enough for God to use you.

You need to be one who truly comes to him and say, nothing in my hands I bring. I have no merit. I have no thing that is worth boasting in.

And so when God uses us, we don't get beside ourselves and think that we are something greater than we really are. But we should be encouraged, brothers and sisters, that no dysfunction, whether of our own doing or the doing of others, will prevent God from working his purposes in our lives, whatever those purposes are.

And as God works, he doesn't have us primarily in view, he has himself in view, and he has his glory in view. And God gets glory out of using people like these.

People who, if they're thinking right, will never try to take any glory to themselves because they know they have none. God does it for his glory and he does it for our good, even when it's painful and even when it's hard.

[58 : 13] And so, brothers and sisters, let us be encouraged, whatever you've experienced, whether it is being rejected, whether it's being abused, whether it's being betrayed, whether it's being deceived, you may be the child who is overlooked in the family by your parents, not liked by your parents, you may have suffered in ways that are too shameful to even talk about.

None of that bars God and how he works in the lives of his children. God, that is good news.

That is good news, brothers and sisters. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you that you are the sovereign Lord.

We thank you, Lord, that you work in the lives of broken people. you don't deal with us according to what our sins deserve. You work out your purposes in and through our lives.

Lord, would you speak to all of our hearts this morning in our dysfunction, in our brokenness, in the difficulties we find ourselves in.

[59 : 43] And Lord, may we be a people of hope, not because we look at our circumstances, but because we look to you. Lord, would you remind us that even now you are at work in our lives for your glory and for our good.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's stand for closing song.