



Stay with me. So Jacob served seven years for Rachel. And they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

And all God's people said, aww. Let's pray. Lord, I need your help tonight as I do every night that I stand to feed your people your word.

That's the only desire we have in this place is to study your word. And so I pray, God, that you would help me teach this. And each week, these messages hit us all in different ways and speak to the realness of life.

And so, Holy Spirit, come and guide my words as we talk about something that is so common in our experience of life. And I pray that we would experience your love in the ashes.

[ 6 : 36 ] In Jesus' name we pray. God's people said, amen. Amen. You can be seated. When Rachel woke up, she had a gun to her head.

She doesn't remember how she got there. But she remembers that morning that she was in serious trouble. And she didn't get in that situation overnight.

It actually, back when she was 12 years old, she lost her father to meth. And her life went in a downward spiral ever since then.

Her family fell apart. She never really had a home. No one ever really cared for her. She spent most of her life alone.

By age 22, Rachel found herself heavily involved in the exotic dancing scene. Even though she was extremely insecure, she found a bit of security in how the men at the clubs would treat her.

[ 7 : 43 ] They would tell her that she was beautiful. They would buy her drinks. They would give her gifts. They made her the center of their attention. And she was drawn to this because, honestly, it was about the only version of love and acceptance she'd ever known.

But it was really just a cover for a life that was walking down a very dark path. One drink led to another.

One man led to another. One drug led to another. In fact, Faith Family, it got so bad that some mornings her five-year-old son had to take care of her because she was so hungover.

But the day Rachel woke up with a gun pointed to her head, she realized she'd hit rock bottom.

The reason is, is because the gun was pointed at her head not because somebody else was in the room. The gun was pointed at her head because she had fallen asleep that way.

[ 8 : 46 ] She just didn't have the guts to pull the trigger. And as she got up that day and she drove towards the club, she kept trying to convince herself just to drive into oncoming traffic.

She was an exotic dancer, a drug addict, an alcoholic, and a self-confessed, quote, terrible mother. A woman who had tried all her life to find love and acceptance, but all she'd ever known was loneliness and rejection.

Faith Family, that's a true story. I wish it weren't. I wish that kind of story, Rachel's story, was uncommon, but it's not at all.

And I'm not referring to the exotic dancers or the drug addicts. I'm talking about ordinary people that feel lost and alone. People who are desperately searching every day for someone to love them, someone to know them, someone to accept them, to feel like they belong.

And this is such a craving for so many people everywhere. It is why, Faith Family, 20 million people visit dating sites in a month.

[ 10 : 07 ] It is why romance novels has over a one billion annual sales. It's why almost every song you hear on the radio is a love song.

It's why people, even at the youngest of age, dream of their wedding day. Some of you are like, I'm going to hate this sermon. All right.

Faith Family, we might as well face it. We are a culture that is addicted to love. And listen, I don't know everything about you, but I know this about you.

Notice this on the screen. All of us long to belong. All of us, in one way or another, like Rachel, we long to belong.

In fact, that's why one of the most painful experiences in life is that of broken or dysfunctional relationships. Divorce, breakups, married but alone, unmet expectations, the search of trying to find someone.

[ 11 : 04 ] Now, don't misunderstand. I'm not being pessimistic. There are many people who experience wonderful relationships and many who experience wonderful times in relationships. But here's my point tonight.

Listen, at some point along your journey in life, in one way or another, you are going to experience relationships that turn to ashes.

In one way or another, you're going to experience human love that turns to ashes. You'll feel the disappointment of love.

And that is exactly what's happening here in Genesis chapter 29. In this passage, we come into contact here with two people who long to belong.

They desire to be known and to experience love. And they will experience the disappointment that love oftentimes brings.

[12:02] Their love and pursuit of it will turn to ashes. And for those of you that think this is a romantic tragedy, it is. All right? But cheer up.

It will end happily ever after. So you've got to stay with me until the end. There is some good stuff coming, but we're going to have to be sad. So I hope you brought the tissues.

Here we go. So Jacob is obsessed with a woman by the name of Rachel. That is what this story is going to revolve around. But before we unpack this love story, I actually want to take you back a little further to Genesis chapter 12 and Genesis chapter 15.

Because we have to understand the context that brings us up to Genesis 29. Back in Genesis 12 and 15, God makes a covenant with a man named Abraham.

Through Abraham, some of you weren't sure on that one. Abraham, through him, God's going to start a new nation. And all the nations will be blessed. And through this line will be the lineage of Christ, what we know as the nation of Israel.

[13:10] Abraham fathers Isaac. Isaac, married to Rebekah, will have two boys, Jacob and Esau.

God tells Rebekah that the older will serve the younger. That is, Esau is going to serve Jacob. What that meant was this messianic line that God has promised through Abraham won't come through the older son.

It will come through the younger son, through Jacob. But nevertheless, Isaac, the father, adored and loved Esau. Showed him favoritism.

It's why Esau will grow up proud and spoiled. And Jacob will grow up rejected and resentful. But Rebekah, Isaac's wife, shows favoritism to Jacob.

And this creates an alienation between Isaac and Rachel. I mean, you thought your family was messed up. Read Genesis. Makes your family look like perfect.

[14:15] And it only gets worse. Because you remember what happens when it comes time for the giving of the blessing, for the giving of the inheritance. Jacob dresses up like Esau.

Because remember, Isaac is unable to see. And he reaches out and thinks he's touching Esau. But instead is touching Jacob and gives Jacob the blessing.

Jacob steals the blessing from his brother. And his brother is furious and is determined to kill Jacob. So Jacob has to get out of Dodge.

He's got to flee into the wilderness for his life. Again, is this making your family situation look better? Some of you are like, honey, we don't have it so bad. All right? Now, let me give you an important implication here.

May I remind you, faith family, that these are the people through whom God is bringing Messiah into the world. They are a complete mess. They're a total disaster.

[15:18] It is as a dysfunctional family as you can possibly get. And yet, this is the family that gets us to Messiah. The point is, don't ever think your life is such a mess that God can't use you.

Amen? Be encouraged by this. If God can use and does use them, he can most certainly use us, even when our life is an absolute disaster.

There's a whole sermon there, but let's keep moving on. Jacob's life is ruined. It's totally ruined. He has no family.

He has no inheritance. He has no home. He has no job. He has no body. And he has fled for his life. And now we come to Genesis 29.

And here, as he enters into Laban's land, that is his mother's brother, his uncle, as he enters, he meets someone there.

[16:17] Pick it up in verse 9. Chapter 29, verse 9. While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess.

Now, as soon as Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of Laban, his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban, his mother's brother, the author just wants you to know, he's his mother's brother, Jacob

came near and rolled the stone of the well's mouth and watered the flock of Laban, his mother's brother.

Then Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud. Then, and Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman and that he was Rebecca's son.

And she ran and told her father. Faith family, love is in the air. All right? This is love at first draw from the well.

I mean, in fact, the text is going to go on to show you just how in love Jacob is when he sees Rachel. Pick it up, verse 15.

[17:17] Verse 15, same chapter. Then Laban said to Jacob, Because you're my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?

Now, Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah. The name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel's was beautiful in form and appearance.

Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter, Rachel. In other words, Jacob is like this.

I'm in love, I'm in love, and I don't care who knows it. That is Jacob's response. I am in love, I'm in love, and I don't care who knows it.

This is biblical proof that he has it worse. She might have it bad, but he has it worse. And all the Old Testament commentators agree that Jacob is being irrational.

[18:14] First of all, buddy, you don't need a wife. You need a job. Some of you, that's wise counsel, right? I mean, you need a job, dude. You don't have any money.

You don't have anything. You don't have an inheritance. You're broke. The last thing that needs to be on your mind is getting married. Second is he's willing to give up seven years.

Seven years of his life to work for Rachel. Now, why? Why would he do something like that? Why would he be so irrational? It's because he is completely obsessed with her.

Look again in verse 20. So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her. Then Jacob said to Laban, give me my wife that I may go into her for my time is completed.

Yeah. The text means what the text means. In fact, I'm like, how should I address that? I won't. I'll let somebody else. Here's what one Jewish commentator says.

[19:24] I'll let them address it. Quote, This statement is so blunt, so graphic, so sexual, so over the top and inappropriate and non-customary that over the centuries Jewish commentators have had to do all kinds of backpedaling to explain it.

But it's not hard to explain. The narrator is showing us a man driven by and overwhelmed with emotional and sexual longing for one woman.

Close quote. That's as delicate as I think it can be put. And here's the point. Here's what you need to understand is going on. Okay, if you've zoned out. I don't know how you could zone out in this sermon.

Some of you hate this. Others of you like, this might be the best sermon I've ever heard. Here's the point, faith family. Jacob's life has fallen apart. It is in complete ruin, but he thinks Rachel can put it back together.

He believes that love and the acceptance of this one woman will make his life make sense again. And I'm not trying to be overly therapeutic here, but remember that Jacob never had his father's love.

[20:37] His father loved Esau, not Jacob. He has craved affection and acceptance all his life. He has now been estranged from his family.

He has lost everything. And he believes Rachel, the most beautiful woman that he's ever seen. If I have her, life will make sense.

And faith family, this is not just going to be true of Jacob. It's going to be true of another character in this story that we'll get to in just a moment. But what I want to show you is how this longing for love makes Jacob a slave.

Look at verse 20 again. So Jacob served seven years for Rachel. I love the Bible because it's so real.

It's so honest. And it's so relevant. I mean, people say the Bible is just a book that doesn't relate anymore. Are you kidding me? Like this is everywhere in our culture.

[ 21 : 38 ] We do the exact same thing. Listen to me, faith family. We load all of our deepest needs for significance, security, and belonging on others.

Through romantic love, through other types of love, we expect other people to do for us and meet the needs of our hearts that long to be accepted and known.

And listen to me, listen. While these are great things, they make bad gods. I mean, some of you are thinking that this sermon is just anti-love.

No, this is not anti-love or anti-human relationships. That's a beautiful thing and a gift from God. But when you make someone else a god, and you think that that relationship is going to be the ultimate source of the love you need, that's when you'll end up in the ashes.

Jacob is obsessed with Rachel. He thinks that she will be the one to put his life back together. And we do the same thing. Now watch how this turns to ashes.

[ 22 : 53 ] Because Laban knows. I mean, Jacob's like, Jacob would not be a good poker player, right? Jacob would be like, Oh, I got an ace! You know, it's like everybody sees your hand, bro.

Like, you've just laid it all out there. Everybody knows how you feel. You're totally obsessed with this woman. And Laban, realizing this, says, Huh. I bet I can get more out of Jacob than seven years.

So Laban has a plan. And he realizes that he can get more here. And so seven years pass. And watch what happens. And now pick it up in verse 21.

Jacob said to Laban, Give me my wife, that I may go into her, for my time is completed. And Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast.

It's time for the wedding. It is just as Laban promised. It was customary in the ancient Near East to throw a great feast for the wedding.

[ 23 : 55 ] And the bride would be brought out in total veil. So you wouldn't be able to see her face. She would be in complete veil. And she's given to the groom. The groom then takes her into the tent.

He is usually inebriated because of all the partying and drinking. And in the darkness of the tent they consummate the marriage. And in the morning, you remember what happens.

Verse 25. And in the morning, behold, it was dope. Leah. And Jacob said to Laban, What is this you have done to me?

Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me? Jacob discovers he's not married to Rachel.

He's married to Leah. And listen. Laban says something. That is easy. I mean, in fact, sometimes some of you will say to me, like, when we study the passage in sermons and weekend gatherings, that you make things come alive that I normally wouldn't have picked up.

[ 25 : 07 ] This might be something you wouldn't pick up on. But it is very, very important. Look at what Laban says when Jacob is so upset that he's been tricked.

Verse 26. Laban said, It is not so done in our country to give the younger before the firstborn. Literally, it reads this.

It's not the custom to put the younger before the older. In other words, Laban did to Jacob what Jacob did to his father. Listen.

In the dark, Isaac couldn't see. Isaac was reaching out thinking he was blessing Esau. But it wasn't Esau.

It was Jacob. In the dark, Jacob thought he was marrying Rachel. But it wasn't Rachel. It was Leah. Laban tricks Jacob the same way Jacob had tricked his father.

[ 26 : 14 ] And now he has to work another seven years for Rachel. Now I told you there's another person in this story who's addicted to love.

And longing for love. And desires acceptance. It would be appropriate at this point for me to ask you to imagine what it must be like to be Leah. Put yourself in her shoes.

Verse 17 says she's unattractive. It says she has weak eyes. But clearly the parallel is that Rachel is beautiful in form and appearance.

And so the parallelism is not that Leah has a problem seeing, but Rachel's beautiful. It is a polite way of saying Leah is not attractive and Rachel was very beautiful.

Leah has had to live under the shadow of her beautiful and attractive sister. The only way someone will marry her is if her father tricks them.

[ 27 : 21 ] And as if that's not bad enough, Jacob, her now husband, wants absolutely nothing to do with her. His heart is set on Rachel.

In other words, everybody right here, everybody right here, Leah is the girl that nobody wants. Leah is the girl always wanting, never receiving.

Always trying to be loved, but never experiencing love in return. Her heart is hollow. And her longing for love has turned to ashes.

And I mean, I would purely be speculating if I tried to think of what Leah dreamed about growing up. Because I know it's the ancient Near East. It's not quite like our culture. But you have to think at least a little bit that she had plans and thoughts of when her wedding day finally came. It surely wouldn't go like this. And so you know what she tries to do? She tries to work and earn the affection of a man.

[ 28 : 30 ] Look at what happens in verse 32. And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben.

For she said, because the Lord has looked upon my affliction, watch, watch, for now my husband will love me.

I know, I know, maybe I can earn his love. I realize he got tricked into this whole thing, but maybe if I have a child for him, then he'll give me the love and affection I so crave.

Look again in verse 34. Here's the point, everybody right here.

Jacob's life fell apart, and he believed Rachel could put it back together. Leah's life has fallen apart.

[ 29 : 34 ] And she thinks if she can just somehow earn the love of a man, her life will be put back together. Both experience love turning to ashes.

Both do. In two very different ways. I would draw from this three just quick application points. That is, how they experience their love turning to ashes.

Number one is this, is relational disappointment. Relational disappointment. And again, I know that all of us in some way or another, whether it's romantic love or another type of relationship, will experience this from time to time.

Jacob marries thinking he will get Rachel, but he ends up getting Leah. And here's the point that I would make, and I don't mean it as a downer. In relationships, listen, no matter how perfect you think the other person is, in the morning it's always Leah.

And I don't mean that as a dig. I'm not making fun of Leah. That's not meant negatively. It is to say that we go into relationships with one expectation, and we wake up in the morning with reality.

[ 30 : 46 ] That is just life. And I'm not trying to, again, be negative. I'm just saying that in relationships, there's always a disappointment.

Because people make bad gods. If you don't believe me, you will at least not argue with C.S. Lewis. Here's what C.S. Lewis says, and I think he's exactly right.

At Faith Family, we are real. Not pessimistic. We're real. We're real. Here's what C.S. Lewis says. Quote, Here's what C.S. Lewis says.

called an unsuccessful marriage or holiday or learned career I'm speaking of the best possible ones there was something we have grasped at in that first moment of longing which just fades away in the reality I think everyone knows what I mean the spouse may be a good spouse and the hotels and scenery may have been excellent and the chemistry may have been a very interesting job but something has evaded us there is a disappointment when we long for any earthly thing to be our ultimate source of acceptance and love everything false it doesn't mean it's bad it doesn't mean it shouldn't be pursued it doesn't mean it's not a gift from God again it just means it makes a bad God and therefore in the morning at some point in the journey you'll realize it's Leah second is relational desperation relational desperation both Jacob and Leah pinned all their hopes on another human being Jacob was willing to work 14 years just for her not for a paycheck not for anything else he worked 14 years just for

Rachel Leah was willing to have multiple children all because they were desperate to be loved third and lastly is relational devastation relational devastation here's the point Leah never gets the love she longs for in Jacob no matter how hard she tries no matter how many children she has she never receives the love her heart desired love turned to ashes her heartworm let's pray that would be the worst ending can you imagine like I thought about cuz sometimes I do that to y'all sometimes I do that to y'all and I thought this is like the saddest story like I mean if you're tracking along you're just like if you ended the sermon there I'd never come back like I'd never come back I'd watch

online but I would never return in person but again faith family let me encourage you that while yes this is a little bit sad it's real life do you know how many broken relationships people experience all around us how many broken relationships those in this room tonight have experienced this is what I love about the bible is it's real I mean if you're if you're out for fairy tale sermon go somewhere else okay we're going to preach the real life that the bible shows us but what have I shown you every single time in every single story everybody come in close God meets them in the ashes and God will meet you in the ashes of your broken relationship God will meet you in your broken and disappointment that you have experienced how I want to show you what happens in Leah's life and if you walk away getting this you get gold because this is what it is all about and this is what will set you free listen Leah finds the love she was meant for the love that all of us was meant for come in close the last we left her she was having children trying to earn the love of a husband but I want you to notice a significant shift in the last child the last verse of chapter 29 verse 35 and she conceived again and bore a son and said not maybe this time my husband will love me maybe this time he'll be attached to me no no she doesn't say that this time she says this time I will praise the Lord therefore she called his name Judah and ceased bearing wow listen listen listen listen I need you to lean in here through all her efforts of trying to earn the love of Jacob she finally rested in the love of Jacob she finally rested in the love of God here's the shift that happened in Leah's life it's beautiful look at it on the screen the Lord became her love the Lord became her love in other words rather than making my husband be a God

[ 37 : 29 ] how about I worship the true one rather than making my spouse or my kids or my whatever relationship rather than making them God how about I just worship the real one it doesn't mean stop loving people it means stop making them gods stop thinking that they actually can fulfill you they may be a gift to you but they are not a substitute for God and do you know what happens as a result of her turning her affection ultimately towards God she gives birth to Judah nobody clapped I expected I expected an amen like yeah Judah what's Judah why does that matter because who's going to come through Judah Jesus in other words listen to this the last child the one where Leah turns her affection to the Lord is the child through whom restoration will come and not only for the world but for Leah's heart Jesus comes from the tribe of Judah Jesus meets Leah in the ashes of her broken relationship that's the good news of the word of God amen that may have been a sad story that's a pretty good ending all right and some of you can relate to that you've been through heartbreak and you've been through sadness but you know what if those ashes will drive you to find love and the only place you were meant to find love that's a good happy ending for you that is happily ever after in your story what are some lessons that we learn from this as we as we wrap it up here's the first is this we learn about the nature of God's love we learn about the nature of God's love faith family you were made to be loved by God and no human love can substitute for that what God is saying in this story to Leah is this I'm your husband I'm your husband I am the one that can give you what you need first John 4 says what God is love and so for us to truly know the love in which we were created for it can only be found in God and the beauty of this is that once you find love ultimately in God it frees the relationships you've made slaves you see Jacob became a slave because he thought human love could do for him what only God's love could do for him but once you find your love in God it frees the relationships that you're in to be able to love in freedom here's the second thing is the nature of the gospel we learn about the gospel here why I told you Leah is the girl that nobody wanted Leah wasn't as beautiful as Rachel Leah listen to me Leah had nothing to give her husband so what did she try to do she tried to earn it but you know what Leah learned notice this on the screen she couldn't earn love doesn't matter how hard you try doesn't matter how many babies you have

doesn't matter what you do to try to earn the love that you're longing for the love you need isn't earned it's received and that my friend is the gospel you do not get salvation by earning it well I'm just gonna go out like Leah and I'm gonna do the best I can to earn God's affection and maybe if I do this and maybe if I do that then maybe maybe God will love me no no no no God already loves you just receive it in the person of Jesus Christ you don't have to earn it he freely gives it that's the good news of the gospel here's the third and I've been hitting on this a lot the negative impact of idolatry the negative impact of idolatry that is people make bad gods yes we should seek love and acceptance but only after we have found it first in the Lord of love there will always be an aspect in every relationship of waking up with Leah human beings will let you down God never will so this story teaches us about the idolatry of relationships of how we place them on on places that they don't

belong that only god belongs and so maybe tonight this has exposed idolatry in your heart fourth and finally i i could preach a whole another sermon on this one that nothing is impossible with god let me ask you a few questions i'm almost done should jacob have deceived uh should jacob have deceived isaac and or isaac and um esau yeah should jacob have deceived his father and his brother no he should not have he he he did wrong in deceiving his father should rebecca have shown favoritism to one son over the other no should isaac have shown favoritism over esau instead of jacob no should laban have deceived jacob no should leah have made an idol out of her husband no here's the point i'm driving at everybody in the story sins everybody makes a complete mess but listen some of you are going to struggle with this but that's okay i'm fully convinced of this but if those things hadn't happened judah isn't born and if judah isn't born jesus isn't born and if jesus isn't born we're all destined for hell you say what point are you driving at are you justifying sin no not at all there is no justification whatsoever for their sin they did wrong and there are no excuses for it but you walk away tonight knowing this notice it on the screen your life is never such a mess that god isn't working his miracle your life is never such a mess that god isn't working his miracle god is not setting up in heaven saying well i didn't see that coming boy that laban that was a really smart one dude like what am i gonna do now no we're getting to judah the entire time maybe a different way of saying it is this notice this on the screen your sin is never greater than his sovereignty your sin is never greater than his sovereignty so guess what you can't mess up his plan and the reason why i preach that and i know it gets what some of you've been taught that's fine is because i see some people so paralyzed what if i'm not in god's will and what if that was god's will oh no what if god's will was that and i should have gone down that road and it listen just live pursuing god not justifying anything trusting that your life will never be in such a mess that god isn't working his masterpiece of his sovereign plan i mean the beauty of watching all the sands of the hourglass so are the days of our lives i mean it is like wow but we're some of y'all didn't know i liked that show did you we're getting to judah because we're getting to jesus and ain't nobody stopping it so you rest in the mess you've made rest in the mistakes that you've made don't justify it or explain it away but know he is in control faith family genesis 29 is about a woman who attempts to find love and that love turns to ashes and yet in the ashes she discovered the love of god she finds true love and that didn't just happen for leah it happened for rachel i'm not talking about the rachel of genesis 29 i'm talking about the exotic dancer who woke up that morning with the gun pointed at her head the night rachel arrived at the club wanting to end her own life she met a group of ladies from a nearby church you see those ladies had made it their ministry to minister to the girls at that club with the manager's permission they would bring gifts they would help with their needs and they would pray with them when rachel saw that group of women she unloaded on them she told them about every hurt and pain she talked about the abuse and abandonment and darkness she was living in and when she finished one of the women in that group said this quote rachel thank you for trusting me with your story my heart breaks for the things that have happened to you close quote and then she just hugged her no sermon no high horse no bumper sticker theology and no Phariseeism just compassion and that night rachel's heart broke and she found true love the love of jesus today rachel is no longer an exotic dancer drugs and alcohol are no longer a part of her life she's moved to a new city where she lives with a family who loves her and her son she is sober she is sane and she is alive because in the ashes she found true love faith family human love can sometimes turn to ashes rachel experienced that jacob and leah experienced that and my guess is that some of you have experienced that but the hope of the gospel is that in those ashes you can find a love that will not forsake you you can know a love that will not abandon you you can know the love you were created for a love that can and will resurrect you from the ashes a love that says to you you don't have to long to belong anymore because you forever belong to me and all God's people said amen let's pray let's pray God thank you for what you're teaching us in this series to take a real honest look at real people who lived real lives and by your grace you recorded them for us in the scriptures and didn't hold back a thing and were able to look in and see ourselves there to have our own idolatry exposed to be drawn to the true love we were created for which was to praise and glorify you to belong to you God and I have no doubt no doubt at all that in this room there are in big ways and even small ways there are all kinds of relational disappointments and maybe even desperation but we've all in some way or another experienced the ashes but [ 50 : 52 ] God you meet us there and you do a beautiful work thank you that we belong to you thank you that what you have done for us in Jesus Christ is the love of our life and I pray it in Jesus

name Amen Amen