

# Desires Of The Heart

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[0:00] Amen. Please take your Bibles this morning and open them up to Genesis chapter 29.! Then Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the east.

As he looked, he saw a well in the field, and behold, three flocks of sheep lying beside it. For out of that well the flocks were watered. The stone on the well's mouth was large, and when all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep and put the stone back in its place over the mouth of the well.

Jacob said to them, My brothers, where do you come from? They said, We are from Haran. He said to them, Do you know Laban, the son of Nahor? They said, We know him. He said to them, Is it well with him?

They said, It is well, and see, Rachel, his daughter, is coming with the sheep. He said, Behold, it's still high day. It is not time for the livestock to be gathered together. Water the sheep and go, pasture them.

But they said, We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together and the stone is rolled away from the mouth of the well. Then we will water the sheep. While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess.

[1:34] Now as soon as Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of Laban, his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban, his mother's brother, Jacob came near and rolled the stone from the mouth of the well and watered the flock of Laban, his mother's brother.

Then Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud. 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. As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he ran to meet him and embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house.

Jacob told Laban all these things. And Laban said to him, Surely you are my bone and my flesh. And he stayed with him a month. Then Laban said to Jacob, Because you are my kinsmen, 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 and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance.

Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter, Rachel. Laban said, It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man.

[2:47] Stay with me. So Jacob served seven years for Rachel. And they seemed to him but a few days because of the love that he had for her. Then Jacob said to Laban, Give me my wife that I may go into her, for my time is completed.

So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast. But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob. And he went into her. Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant.

And in the morning, behold, it was 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? Laban said, It is not so done in our country to give the younger before the firstborn.

Complete the week of this one and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years. Jacob did so and completed her week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife.

Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant. So Jacob went into Rachel also and he loved Rachel more than Leah and served Laban for another seven years.

[3:53] When the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her 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. 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 no children to Jacob, she envied her sister. And 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's my servant Bilhah. Go into her so that she may give birth on my behalf, that even I may have children through her.

[5:01] So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife, and Jacob went into her. And Bilhah 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. Rachel's servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. And then Rachel said, With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister and have prevailed.

So she called his name Naphtali. 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.

[6:02] 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? 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, 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.

[7:09] The grass withers, and the flower fades, but the word of the Lord endures forever. Father, we pray once more as we open up your word this morning.

God, would you rightly order our desires? God, would we put you first, and seek you first in all things? And would you show us that you are supremely worthy of our heart's attention this morning?

We pray in Christ's name. Amen. You may be seated. One of the biggest lies that we are told from a young age is that we ought to listen to our heart.

And that seems to be the theme of most of the Disney movies that I grew up watching. You all know that there's plenty of songs that have that very line, that we ought to listen to our heart. You may have either given that counsel in the past or received that counsel in the past.

And the idea is, well, you know what you want, but you know what you want. And that is what's most important. No one can tell you no. And so go out and get it. Listen to your heart.

[8:16] Well, the Bible says something a little bit different than that. Jeremiah 17, verse 9. It tells us the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick.

Who can understand it? And we're never once in the Bible told to trust our heart and let it lead us wherever it will. On the contrary, rather, we're told in Proverbs, trust in the Lord with all your heart. Do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and let Him. He will direct your paths. What we notice as we look at this story this morning is that this is an origin story of the 12 tribes of Israel.

And to be honest, the story is not pretty, is it? Oh, this story, everybody in this story is listening to their heart, and they're making the desires of their heart ultimate.

And the story from beginning to end is filled with sinfulness, with manipulation, with good desires that become ultimate obsessions.

[9:19] And, you know, there's a biblical word for that. Do you know what it is? It's idolatry. An idol is anything, even good things, that become God things in our hearts.

John Calvin famously once said that the human heart is an idol factory. And so one reason why we ought not trust our heart and listen to our heart is that our hearts are constantly fabricating and creating idols.

We take good things and we make them into God things in our hearts. We see it so clearly here with the hearts and the desires of Jacob and Laban and Rachel and Leah.

They all want something so desperately that it drives them to act in sinful and foolish ways. And the bad news this morning, church, is that we are all prone to do this exact same thing.

We are all prone to follow the desires of our heart into all sorts of messy places. But the good news, and the good news of our passage this morning, is that our sovereign God is able and willing to take a big mess like this and work something beautiful from it.

[10:41] So let's take a look. And what we'll see this morning are four sinful desires and one sovereign God. This is our outline this morning. If you're taking notes, four sinful desires and one sovereign God.

And we'll start here with the men first, Jacob and Laban. Let's look at Jacob first. First we see that Jacob desires a bride. Look there, starting in verse 1 of chapter 29.

Jacob, you remember he's on his way to Haran to find a wife. He's heading to Mesopotamia. His parents don't want him to marry a Canaanite woman. They want him to marry within the tribe, within the family.

And so finally he makes his way to Haran. And it says that he looks out and he sees a well out in the field. And over by the well, there are three flocks of sheep.

And on top of the well is this huge stone covering. I assume that it's there to protect the well from outsiders getting the water or even animals making use of it when they're not supposed to.

[11:45] And it says that when all the flocks were gathered there with all the shepherds together, collectively they would use all their strength to pick up and to roll that stone off the well and water all of the sheep.

And so Jacob comes and he sees all of this. And he comes up to these shepherds and he asks the question, Where are you guys from? That's a million-dollar question, isn't it?

This is before the age of GPS. I don't know how anybody knew how to get anywhere. But Jacob, he's not exactly sure where he is. He needs to confirm that he's in the right place. And so he asks them, Where are you from?

They say, Yes, we're from Haran. So the follow-up question is, Well, do you know Laban, the son of Nahor? And they say, Yes. Things are going well.

And as they stand there exchanging pleasantries, the shepherds say, Actually, well, here comes his daughter right now. Now, put yourself in Jacob's shoes. He has been on a mission to go and to find his wife.

[12:46] He knows that God has promised him that his offspring will be more numerous than the dust of the earth. He knows that God will provide him a wife and will, through her, provide him many children.

And now, at long last, he's in the right place. He's found his family members. And this eligible bachelorette is coming up right to him. He's right where he needs to be. And she is drop-dead gorgeous. So what does Jacob do? Jacob does what all men do when they are on the pursuit.

First thing he does is he tries to get rid of the competition. And you notice that. Look here. Jacob wants these other guys gone. And so in verse 7, he says, Hey, guys, shouldn't you be going now? Shouldn't you be watering these sheep and get on out of here, right? I remember when I was in middle school, I played some reverse psychology on a buddy of mine.

[13:44] I knew that he was interested in this girl. I had no interest. But I told him, If you don't hurry up and ask her out, I will. And that little thread of competition lit a fire under him.

So he got up and actually asked her out. I guess they are happily married to this day with me to thank. And Jacob tries to get rid of the competition, get out of here.

But they say, No, that's not actually really possible. We have to be here because all of us have to work together and use our collective strength to pick up this big stone off the well so that we can water the sheep.

So what does Jacob do next? He does the other thing that all men do when they're on the pursuit. He tries to make himself stand out. He's like, Look at me, Rachel.

Watch what I can do. He says, He lays eyes on Rachel as she comes up to water the sheep. And as soon as Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of Laban, his mother's brother, Jacob puffs up his chest.

[14:46] He musters up all the strength he's got. And he goes and he rolls that big heavy stone away. All by himself. He doesn't need any help, does he? I just think that's such an accurate and hilarious picture of men.

Right? If you can't chase away the competition, at least make sure that she's going to notice you. You're going to do something impressive. Probably something a little silly. Right? Make sure that she notices you. And in this act of superhuman strength, he rolls that stone away.

And then he goes and he waters her flock for her. And then he kisses her. And it's not a romantic kiss. This is just a hello. And then this big, burly, strong man, he burst into tears.

I mean, can you tell how excited he is? And can you tell how desperately Jacob wants to be married? What does Rachel do in response to all of this? Verse 12 says she runs away.

She goes and she tells her father everything that's happened. And we'll get to Laban here in a minute. But as soon as Laban hears all of this, he runs out to Jacob.

[15:53] He greets Jacob. He kisses Jacob. Everybody's kissing everybody. And Jacob winds up staying there with Laban for a whole month. And apparently while Jacob's there, he works for Laban.

And Laban asks him, well, what kind of payment do you want? Just because your family doesn't mean I can't pay you something. And here is Jacob's opportunity, isn't it?

He has been living there with Laban for a month now. He's gotten to know the family. And it says that, verse 16 says, Laban has two daughters, Leah and Rachel.

Leah is the older sister and Rachel is the younger sister. But Jacob's heart clearly is set on Rachel, isn't it? And it says that Leah's eyes were weak.

Now there's conversation about what that might mean. I mean, it could mean that her eyesight literally was poor. She couldn't see very well. It could mean that just an invisible appearance.

[16:50] Her eyes were just kind of dull and unimpressive. Or, and this is kind of what I'm more inclined to think, is that her eyes were soft. She had gentle eyes.

I think she maybe had pretty eyes. But in comparison to Rachel, it says Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. I mean, to Jacob, Rachel was the whole package.

Maybe Leah had some nice eyes, but Rachel, Rachel is the prize to be won. So he says, Laban, I will serve you for seven years for your younger daughter, Rachel.

Now think about that for a minute. What has happened in your life over the past seven years?

That's a long time, isn't it? That seems like an unreasonable amount of time.

And you can tell that it's pretty extreme because Laban, he doesn't even negotiate with him, does he? He just says, all right. Jacob here is, in essence, he's saying, I will do anything to have this

woman, Rachel, as my wife.

[17:51] Now, on one hand, the romantic side of us might think, man, what a guy, right? I mean, he knows what he wants.

He is willing to do anything to get her as his wife. I mean, just look at his devotion. Look at his feats of strength. That is impressive, right?

But on the other hand, do you ever wonder? We should realize, I mean, Jacob might be taking this good desire to a place of extreme obsession.

And more than that, I mean, he seems to be making this decision almost entirely based on what his eyes find attractive, doesn't he? Yes, it's good for him to go find a wife.

And God has directed him to do so. Yes, God has promised him offspring. And yes, we know that through his offspring, the Messiah will come. But here's a spoiler for you.

[18:50] God does not bring about the Messiah through Rachel, does he? He brings about the Messiah through Leah. All of this pursuit of Rachel, this is entirely Jacob, isn't it?

This isn't about what God wants. This is about what Jacob wants and is driven entirely by the lust of the flesh and the desire of the eyes. He's willing to do anything at all to get what he wants.

And friend, that is exactly what an idol is. That is exactly what an idol does. When we adopt the mindset of, I must have this thing, I must have this person, I must have this life, and I am willing to do anything at all to get it at all costs, it is highly likely that we have an idol ruling in our hearts.

Some of you who are single and searching for a spouse, or maybe some of you who have children or grandchildren that are getting to this phase, please, please, please hear me.

A spouse, you know, is a wonderful gift. But it is a terrible God. It is something to be desired and to be pursued, but do not turn a good thing into a God thing in your heart.

[20:11] Whether it's a spouse or anything else, we ought to check our desires and ask ourselves, do I desire this in such a way that I would be willing to trade away anything and everything to get it?

Or even to ask, well, what is it that's driving my pursuits? Is it my eyes? Is it my stomach? Is it my flesh?

Or is it the promises of God? Do I trust the Lord to provide in His time and in His way? Or am I trying to weasel my way in here and work it all out according to my plan and get what I want, when I want, how I want?

Jacob, here, he serves for seven years. And to him, it says, it seems like just a few days because of how much he loved Rachel. And now the time has finally come.

He's served his time. And here, now, second, we see Laban's heart on display. Second, we see Laban. Laban desires prosperity.

[21:14] Jacob says, it's time. I've served my time seven years. It's time to give me my wife. And so Laban, it says, he gathers everyone together. He throws a celebration.

He makes the feast. But verse 23, it says, in the dark of the evening, he takes Leah and he gives Leah to Jacob. And this is premeditated.

This is deception. We can assume that it's dark. He chooses to do all this in the evening. And we can assume that Leah is veiled. We can assume that Jacob is eating and drinking at this feast.

And Jacob has no reason to assume that Laban is going to pull a fast one on him. Up to this point, he assumes that Laban is acting in good faith. But when Jacob wakes up the next morning, he says, behold, it's Leah.

And I wonder how that conversation went, don't you? This is not the bride that he signed up for. And so he's rightfully angry. And he gets up and he goes to Laban.

[22:21] And he says, what is this that you've done to me? Did I not serve you for Rachel? Why have you deceived me? Listen to what Laban says.

Laban says, we don't do it like that here. In our country. We don't put the younger before the older. Now just real quick.

Do you hear the irony here? Isn't it ironic that Jacob, the trickster, has now been tricked?

Isn't it ironic that Jacob, the younger brother, who supplanted his older brother, who took the place of the blessing of his older brother, is trying to come and do this somewhere else?

And he's the one getting a fast one put on him. Don't you think his conscience would be pricked as Laban says, no, we don't do that here in our country. We don't put the younger before the older. Just to chase this rabbit trail here for a minute, we should know.

[23:25] Church, the Bible tells us our sin will find us out. And Jacob's trickery has now come full circle and fallen back on his own head.

He is now the one who's been tricked. Laban tricks Jacob out of seven years of his life, seven years of labor, but he's not done yet. He knows how much Jacob wants Rachel and desires Rachel. And so he says, I'll tell you what, Jacob, if you finish out the week with Leah and I will give you Rachel on one condition, you're going to give me seven more years of labor.

You see how Laban knows what Jacob wants? He knows exactly the desires of Jacob's heart. Do you see what Laban wants? Now, do you see the desires of Laban's heart?

This father of two daughters, does he seem to care about either of them? He doesn't seem to care about them at all, about their good. What does he care about most? All Laban cares about is the bottom line.

[24:32] He doesn't care about Jacob, his kinsmen. He doesn't care about Jacob's desires. He cares about what he can get out of Jacob for his own benefit.

You know, this is another clear indicator of an idol in our hearts. When we idolize something, be it money or something else, often we will use other people as a means to an end in order to get what we want.

Have you ever seen that happen? And again, money is not a bad thing. Prosperity is not a bad thing. Some of you operate, own your own businesses.

You should want to operate out of profit. And that's okay. It's okay to be successful. It's okay to be prosperous. But there is a world of difference between utilizing money as a tool and idolizing money as a God.

When we begin to sacrifice others on the altar of our prosperity, when we begin to be manipulative and when we use other people for our own good, well, then we can know as a clear indicator that this good gift has become a God in our hearts.

[25:43] Church, I'm sure you recognize that our culture idolizes money, don't they? I mean, you look at where we live, right? Mount Perfect, Mount Plastic, the Hollywood of the East Coast.

Everyone either wants to have money or wants to look like they have money. And when is it enough? Money itself is not bad, but the love of money is the root of all kinds of evils.

We're told you cannot serve both God and money. Laban has made an idol of the bottom line. He sets the trap and Jacob, blinded by his own idol, blinded by his own love for Rachel, he agrees.

And verse 28 says he completes Leah's week and then he takes Rachel as his wife. And he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he served Laban for another seven years.

And these two men are blinded by their desires, aren't they? But it's not just the men that have the problems. Let's look now at the women, okay? Leah and Rachel.

[26:49] We'll start with Leah. So third here, third sinful desire. Third, we see Leah desires to be loved. She desires to be loved.

We don't know much about Leah's background. We don't know much about her upbringing. But what we have seen is how her father has treated her in this instance, haven't we? And I don't want to go too far down this track.

But of course, the way that our parents raise us, it's not ultimate. It doesn't set the course for our life in stone. And I don't want to lean too much into kind of the secular psychology of all of this.

But of course, our relationship with our parents, it impacts the way that we go about our lives, doesn't it? I mean, it shapes us in a major way, more than we probably know.

And if you grew up with a distant father, an unaffectionate father, an abusive father, of course, that can create some lasting insecurities in your life, can't it?

[27:49] Leah's father has just used her as a bargaining chip to get some more money. He has used her to get what he wants. And now she's handed over to Jacob, her new husband, who doesn't want anything to do with her because he's in love with her younger sister.

I mean, how do you think Leah feels in this moment? How do you think Leah felt the morning after her wedding day to wake up to her husband's disgust at her being there? Leah feels and she is unloved.

And even more than that, verse 31, it says the Lord saw that Leah was hated. She was despised. Can you imagine feeling like some unwanted guest in your own home?

I mean, surely she can see how happy her husband is with her sister. I mean, can you imagine the tension in that household? I mean, this is messy, isn't it? In fact, it's interesting, later on, they wrote it into law.

Leviticus 18, verse 18, it says, You shall not take a woman as a rival wife to her sister. They realized this is just a bad idea all around. Now, I think they may have used this as a case study and say, This is not good.

[29:01] And Laban doesn't seem to care for Leah. Jacob doesn't seem to care for Leah. But notice who does care for Leah. Verse 31 says, The Lord saw that Leah was hated, and he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren.

And here's where we get to see this origin story now of these 12 tribes. It says, Leah conceived and bore a son called his name Reuben, which means see, a son. And look what she says.

She says, Now my husband will love me. She conceives again and names him Simeon, which means heard. And he says, The Lord has heard that I'm hated. And again she conceives and bears a son and says, Now my husband, this time he'll be attached to me because I've born him three sons.

And so she calls his name Levi, which sounds like the Hebrew word for attached. I mean it's all just so sad, isn't it? But do you hear the desires of her heart? When she writes it into the names of her own children.

I am hated and I want to be loved. Do you hear what Leah's feeling here? All I want is for my spouse to love me.

[30:13] And I will do anything to get it. I wonder if you've ever felt that way. If you felt lonely or rejected or unwanted or unloved.

And again it's not wrong to want to be loved. In fact that's good and that's right. Especially in the context of a healthy marriage. That's good for your spouse to love you.

And to pursue you. And to make you feel wanted. And to feel desired. And to feel loved. Jacob is failing in his responsibility as a husband. This is not a healthy marriage.

But do you see this common thread of idolatry running through? How these desires drive their actions? Jacob was willing to give years and years and years of hard labor to get what he wanted. Laban was willing to lie and to cheat to get what he wanted. And now Leah is willing to use her fertility to get what she wants. Not one of them have considered the Lord and his desires.

[31:20] Not one of them have put any of these desires in proper perspective. Until verse 35. It says she conceived again and bore a son.

And said this time I will praise the Lord. She called his name Judah. Which sounds a lot like the Hebrew word for praise.

And it says that at this point she stopped bearing. And we know church in God's wisdom and God's sovereignty and God's plan. That it is through the line of Judah.

Through the tribe of Judah. That the Messiah Jesus Christ will come. Jesus Christ will be the lion of the tribe of Judah. Do you see the shift that's happened for Leah here?

Her eyes were so fixed on her husband. Fixed on her own desires. Fixed on her own need for affirmation. Her desire to be loved. That she forgot to even consider the Lord.

[32:21] In fact up to this point her mentions of the Lord. She was even using him as a means to an end. To get what she wanted wasn't she? The Lord has seen me.

So now maybe he'll give me a son and my husband will love me. The Lord has heard me. And now maybe my husband will love me. The Lord's given me another son. So now maybe my husband will love me.

It's not about the Lord is it? It's all about her desire and need for love. Wives and husbands. And those who will one day be wives and husbands.

Do not believe the cultural lie that your spouse is one who completes you. Do not believe the fairytale idea of a happy marriage where all of your self-esteem, all of your worth, all of your identity

is wrapped up in the love and affection and attention of this other person.

Now again, it is good and right to be loved. But only in the Lord are you complete. Only in the perfect love of the Lord will you find true satisfaction.

[33:35] And to put that on your spouse is asking too much of them. Jacob wants a spouse. Laban wants prosperity. Leah wants love.

And fourth, we see Rachel desires children. Look there to chapter 30 verse 1. It says, Can you imagine that?

Rachel has it all. She's got the looks. She's got the husband who loves her. Leah has this one thing going for her. But clearly it's the one thing that Rachel doesn't have.

And it is the one thing that Rachel desires deeply. So look what she says to Jacob. She says, Give me children or I'm going to die. Clearly this is an idol for Rachel.

She's not too subtle at hiding it, is she? But there's your sign, right? If there's anything in your life that you think life wouldn't be worth living without it, that is an idol.

[34:40] If there is anything in your life that you have right now, and if it were taken away from you that you think life would not be worth living anymore, that may just be an idol in your heart.

If there's anything that you desire so strongly that you feel incomplete, and you think my life would be so much greater, if only that may be an idol in your heart.

For Rachel, it seems to be children. Rachel desires to have children, which again, church, that is a wonderful thing. That is a good thing. And culturally, outside of these four walls, culturally, it seems like there's been a shift away from valuing children.

And a shift away from valuing childbirth. In fact, the U.S. recorded its lowest fertility rate ever. 1.6 births per woman in the year 2024.

Lowest fertility rate ever. Globally, that's the fact as well. Globally, birth rates are down to 2.2 per woman in 2023. That's down all the way from 5.3 in 1963.

[35:51] That is a huge decrease, isn't it? Now, we can sit here and speculate as to why. I've got several ideas, but I think that is clear. We're culturally getting married and having kids.

That's becoming more and more and more weird. And let me just say, Christians ought to be okay being very weird in that sort of culture. You should get married if you desire.

You should have lots of kids. You should raise them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Be fruitful and multiply. Make disciples of your children. Be very weird in a culture that despises children.

But also, friend, there is a danger on the other side as well. The danger, the swing in the other direction is desiring this good thing so much that for you it becomes an idol.

We should realize children are wonderful gifts, but they too are terrible gods. We shouldn't be like Rachel and let this desire for children rule over us so much that we feel like without them, life doesn't even seem worth living.

[37:09] And the hard truth is, we see it here with Rachel and Leah, the Lord is sovereign over all things, including life in the womb. The Lord may not grant your desire to have children.

Have children? I wonder, are you content to wait on Him and to share your desires with Him and to trust Him to do as He pleases?

And Jacob is angry with Rachel's demands. He says, am I in the place of God? I can do everything I know how to do. It's God that gives life in the womb. God is sovereign over your womb.

God's the one who opens and closes the womb. But Rachel, she's not content with that answer, is she? She must have children. This is for her life or death. Life is not worth living unless I get children.

In fact, more children than my sister. So she takes matters into her own hands. And again, this messy origin story continues. She gives Bilhah, her servant, to Jacob.

[38:06] Bilhah conceives and bears a son. They call him Dan because she says, God has judged me and heard my voice. Bilhah conceives again, bears another son. I'm Naphtali, which sounds like wrestling.

And she says, it's because I'm wrestling with my sister here. And I prevailed. Now Leah jumps in. Now she's infertile. And so what's she going to do? Now she gives her servant, Zilpah, to Jacob.

And Zilpah bears Gad and bears Asher. And the tension in this family, you can just taste it, can't you? And this is almost unbearable. But they're not finished, are they?

Verse 14 tells the story. It says, one day in the days of the wheat harvest, Reuben went out and got some mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother, Leah.

Now this is interesting. I never understood what the big deal was. Outside of just being petty. We're going to argue over some mandrakes. But apparently, I learned this week, that mandrakes were a powerful aphrodisiac in the ancient world.

[39:07] You know what that is. They would eat them or they would grind them up. They would smell them and it would get everybody in the mood. That's what this is all about. And here in this competition between sisters on who can have the most children, this is seen as an advantage.

And so Rachel asks nicely, please give me some of your son's mandrakes. Now up to this point, she's still not born a child for Jacob. It's all been through her servant. And of course, this is made into an issue.

And they argue about it. There's tension, but eventually and ironically even, Rachel says, Leah, you can go sleep with Jacob in exchange for the mandrakes.

And now she is using her husband to get what she wants. Don't you see how the sin of idolatry just ruins everything? Don't you see the outflow of sin in the life of a family when we idolize these things, these treasures, these good gifts?

We use other people as means to an end to make us satisfied. So Leah lays with Jacob and she bore Issachar, which sounds like wages.

[40:17] And again, she bore Zebulun and then a daughter. And we'll hear her story in a few weeks. It's also so tragic. But after all of this, finally, verse 22 says, God remembered Rachel.

And God listened to her and God opened her womb. And at last she conceived and she 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. She's still not satisfied, is she? Friend, do you see the deceitfulness of our hearts?

Do you see the dangers of idolatry? I wonder if you see yourself in any of these four people. Again, Jacob desires a spouse.

Laban desires money. Leah desires love. Rachel desires children. But I wonder, what is it that you desire? What is it for you that you desire more than anything else in the world?

[41:22] Is there anything that you wish you could have so desperately you'd be willing to do anything to get it? Or anything that, without it, life just doesn't seem worth living?

All of this is a complete mess, isn't it? You know, God's people, the 12 tribes, would look back and they would read this account and they would say, man, we're not all that special, are we?

Our backstory is messed up. All the patriarchs were sinners just like us. Abraham was a sinner. His story is messed up. Isaac was a sinner.

His story is messed up. Jacob's story is the same. We come from a history and a line of sin and idolatry. I think this would be humbling for them if it had its full effect.

I think this would be humbling to know that they, like everybody else who descends from Adam, is born into this messed up line of sin and guilt.

[42:20] But I think they would also marvel to know that this holy God has, out of the abundance of his grace, chosen to look upon sinners like us and love us with an everlasting faithfulness, according to his great promises.

Of course, as we look to the pages of the New Testament, we see that in all of this, our good and sovereign and faithful God is at work, even in this mess of a family, to bring about the redemption of his people, to the praise of his glorious grace.

God works out all things, even in this mess, to bring us to the Savior and to bring the Savior to us.

Matthew chapter 1, it tells us, Jesus is the son of Abraham, the liar.

He's the son of Isaac and Jacob and Judah. We've just seen how messed up they are. He descends from Rahab, the prostitute. He's the son of David, the adulterer and the murderer.

On and on and on and on it goes. When you read through Jesus' origin story, his family history, guess what? You see how messed up it is. And we trace it all the way back here to Judah, the offspring of a hated and forgotten woman, Leah.

[43:46] But that's exactly the point. There is one hero in this book. Jesus Christ has stepped down into our brokenness.

He has willingly entered into our dysfunction. He has embodied this fallen human nature, yet without sin. He has stepped into our mess and into our drama in order to redeem us.

I mean, how incredible is it that our God has worked out all things and worked in all things, even sinful human desires, in order to bring about redemption in Christ, to the praise of his glorious grace, to bless sinners like us.

Brent, if you see a reflection of your own sinful heart in this passage, if you think on your own back story and realize that nothing in you commends you to God, and if you consider your own family history and you realize, man, my family is a mess.

I come from a long line of sin and failure and idolatry. Guess what? All that does is show your readiness to receive a perfect Savior who stepped into our mess in order to redeem what is broken.

[45:09] Paul says in 1 Corinthians, Consider your calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise.

God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

And because of him, you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that as it is written, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord. Let's pray. Father, there is nothing in us that would commend us to you. God, we confess that we are so often ruled by the desires of our hearts.

that we confess that we are a mess apart from you. But Lord, you are pleased to take what is broken and to make it whole. And to take sinful desires and to transform them.

[46:23] God, we pray that you would give us desire for Christ, that we'd be satisfied in him. God, we would trust in the Lord with all our heart and lean not on our own understanding. Acknowledge you in all our ways and would you direct our paths.

We pray in Christ's name. Amen.