

In The Beginning...God: Leah & Rachel

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So, you think *you've* got a messed up family

Show of hands

How many of you have a messed up...?

Stop... stop...

Some of them are in the room!

What's the matter with you?!?

In the 32nd chapter of Genesis

God says to Jacob

Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome. – Genesis 32:28b (NIV)

God chooses to bless Jacob

To name a nation after him

To use his family

As THE family

From that point on

Throughout history

And they were a mess

Let me give you a picture of the family tree:

You have Jacob / Israel

And he wanted to marry Rachel

But he got tricked into marrying her older sister

Whom he never really loved, named

Leah

He had four sons with Leah

And she named them to describe her heartache

Over not being loved

She named the first one, Reuben

"The Lord has seen my misery"

The next one, Simeon

"Because the Lord heard I am not loved"

The third son, Levi

"Now at last my husband will become attached to me"

And her fourth son, Judah

"This time I will praise the Lord"

Presumably because she didn't

The first 3 times

So, then her sister

The pretty one
Says since I can't have kids
She was barren
Since I can't have kids
I think I'll have my husband sleep with my maid

And Jacob

Because he was a father of our faith

Jacob says...

"ok"

So, she had two kids

That Rachel still named

Dan, meaning

"God has vindicated me"

And Naphtali, meaning

"I have had a great struggle with my sister and won"

Let me stop a second

Sometimes, when I read the Bible

I lose the shock

That I think was probably intended

This woman

Has a son

Through a surrogate

That probably couldn't say no
And she names him

The name he'll carry with him
For his entire life

She names him

"I have had a great struggle with my sister and won"

Show of hands...

Just kidding

So, in response

Leah does the only thing a girl can do

She says I see your handmaid

And I give you another

And Jacob

Because he was a father of our faith

Said... "sure"

She had Gad

"What good fortune"

And Asher

"The women will call me happy"

You still get a little bit

Of the competitive sass there, don't you?

"The women will call *me* happy"

Can you imagine kindergarten for these kids?

Hey "The women will call me happy"

Come over here and say you're sorry to

"I have had a great struggle with my sister and won"

What a mess

Then Leah has two other sons:

Issachar

"God has rewarded me for giving my maidservant to my husband"

Which I'm not sure

Is theologically accurate

That decision had an impact for sure

And God brought a great nation out of this family

With all their mess

But I'm not sure God was rewarding her for that choice

And then her 6th son, Zebulun

"This time my husband will treat me with honor"

Ladies, can I give you some advice

If your husband doesn't honor you for son 1-5

Number 6 is probably not gonna do it

And then finally

Finally

Rachel has a child

A son

She named him Joseph

Catch this

Joseph means

"May He add another"

No satisfaction

No contentment

No peace

"May he add another"

And yet

For all of their disfunction

God uses them to change the world

Let me show you

Grab a Bible

And turn to Genesis 28 (Page 19)

Welcome

Online

Teach Genesis 28:10-22

So, Jacob has a dream

About a stairway to Heaven

And then I want you to look at verse 16-17

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.... This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of Heaven.” – Genesis 28:16-17 (NIV)

He names this place Bethel

Beth in Hebrew means “House”

El is short for Elohim

Which means God

Beth – El

House of God

And when you picture this scene

A stairway to Heaven

You may picture this

Or this

Or maybe this

But a more accurate picture

Is this

This is the real, modern-day location

Of Beth-el

The stairway

The Gate of Heaven

And you'll notice it looks a lot like

The ancient middle-eastern ziggurat

Or the south American ziggurat

Or the Egyptian pyramids

Some archaeology scholars believe

That this is best explained

By a people

Taking on a great building project

And then being scattered

Throughout the known world

With that common vision in their mind

Much like the Biblical account

Of the Tower of Babel

In Genesis 11

Now we don't know exactly what year

The tower of Babel occurred

Or what happened to the tower

After the Lord stopped construction

But Jacob

Would have almost certainly been aware of it

And Abraham – his grandpa

Might have been alive during it

So, Jacob makes a vow

Says a prayer

Makes a commitment

And God honors that faith

Jacob gets so much wrong

But we see a humble faith under it

And God honors that

Jacob's success

Much like ours
Is about God
Not about us

Look at Genesis 29:9

This is exactly what happened
When Amy & I met

But I told her to knock it off
I said – pull yourself together
Hasn't struggled like that since
Actually

Verse 14

Read Genesis 29:14b-20

Leah's description

“weak eyes”

We're not exactly sure what that means

It's clearly in contrast

To Rachel's description

If you have questions about Rachel's description, by the way

Ask Keith

He'll be in the lobby after service

Thank him for 10 years

And then ask about Rachel

But “Weak eyes”

We don’t know if she had a deformity

Or if that was just slang

For being unattractive

I read one Jewish Rabbi who said

“It is difficult to determine if Leah’s eyes are an impairment or a physical description. The rabbis teach that Leah’s eyes were tender because she wept constantly.” – Rabbi Mack

To understand this account

Is to understand how God pulls for the underdog

How God breaks

For those who are broken

Psalm 145:13b-14 (NIV) - The Lord is trustworthy in all He promises and faithful in all He does. The Lord upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.

Notice verse 21

I won’t read it to keep things PG-13

But let me give some advice

To the young men

As a father of four daughters

Verse 21's a good way

To get smacked in the mouth

Verse 22

Read Genesis 29:22-30

And then they started having kids

They had Reuben
Simeon
Levi
Judah
Dan
Naphtali
Gad
Asher
Issachar
Zebulun
And Joseph

And here's the thing

I hadn't caught before

All eleven of these boys

Were born during the first 7 years

Of Jacob's marriage

To Rachel & Leah

They had 11 boys

Ages 7 & under

If you weren't sure why polygamy was a bad idea before

My goodness

And even Benjamin

I don't have time to explain now

But ask me if you're interested

Benjamin was probably only 6 or 7 years

Younger than Joseph

They were stairsteps

If there ever was stairsteps

I'm not sure 11 boys under 7

Is a stairway to Heaven

Moving on...

These 12 sons

Of Jacob

Become the patriarchal leaders

Of the 12 tribes of Israel

And their significance

To the people of Israel

Is hard to overstate

What can we learn from their story?

From their life?

Their lives

Tether us to a

Deep Sense of Humility

I don't understand

I sincerely do not understand

How people can read the Old Testament

About the messed up, dysfunctional lives

Of their forefathers

And come away arrogant

That crew would crush the Neilson Ratings

If they were on Jerry Springer

They're a mess

I don't understand

For that matter

How a person can read the New Testament

And come away arrogant

Christians should be

The humblest people on the planet

We're not often

But we should be

The humblest people on the planet

Because the Bible is full

Chocked full

Of God forgiving

And redeeming

And using

Broken, messed up, sinful people

Of forgiving

Redeeming

Using

Broken, messed up, sinful families

James the brother of Jesus

Declared the following:

James 4:6b (NIV) - God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.

God opposes us if we live in pride

Let me let that sink in a minute

God is in opposition to you

 If you live in pride

But Jacob is evidence

 That God can use

Even the biggest loser

 If they're humble

Lesson #1 is a deep sense of humility

Lesson #2 is:

Trust for God's Word

Consider the embarrassing list

 That is Jacob's life

The people of Israel

 Are named after this man

And yet consider:

 He married two women

 Sisters

He also had kids with two more ladies

He deceived his brother

He deceived his father

He deceived his father-in-law

You think you have bad parenting moments

Several of his kids

Ganged up on one of his other kids

And sold him into slavery

Your kids are better than his kids

What's my point?

The Bible doesn't record those things

Unless they're true

And if the Bible is willing to record

The really embarrassing stuff

You can trust it for the rest

Because if was gonna make stuff up

It would have changed this story

You can Trust God's Word

Psalm 119:89-90a – Your Word, LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the Heavens. Your faithfulness continues through all generations; You established the earth, and it endures.

When God's Word feels shaky to some here on earth, know that it stands firm in the Heavens

God made the earth and He keeps it spinning

He knows how to run things

And He knows how your life should run and He would help your life tremendously if you would just listen to His words... and obey them

Isaiah 40:8 – The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Word of our God endures forever.

Things in this life come & go – but God’s word stands unchanged & uncompromised, firm through the ages

The Book of Isaiah was written about 700 years before Jesus

I want you to take a second to consider how different life was then

I did some research, during Isaiah’s lifetime, consider all that was invented

During his lifetime:

The Celts invented scissors

The Romans invented a crude lock & key

Musical notation was invented in India

If it wasn’t for the Indians, Nashville, as we know it, wouldn’t exist

The Greeks invented coins

The Italians invented false teeth

It would be hard to eat spaghetti if you lost your teeth

Isaiah, who wrote these words in a world without scissors, locks, coins, or dentures

And declared that God’s word would remain relevant no matter what things would change in our ever-changing world

And 2,700 years later

Billions of people revere those relevant words

And are gathered right now

Honoring the One who wrote them

You can trust God's Word

You can trust God's Ways

I mean, if God can use

That guy

If God can use "that guy"

He can use any of us

Honestly, it's the highest form of humility

The highest form of humility

To believe that God can use you

In spite of you

In fact, it is the highest form of arrogance

To believe that God

Cannot use you

Because of something *you've* done

It's not really all relying on you

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV) - Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will direct your paths.

You can trust God's ways

I can't always trust my own ways

I can't trust my own intuition

My own understanding

"Do not lean on your own understanding"

Instead, "Trust in the Lord"

"Submit to Him"

"And He will direct your path"

Let me ask you to do something with me

Would you bow your head

Take a moment to humble yourself before God

God opposes the proud

You do not want to be in opposition to the Lord of Heaven's Armies

Take a moment to acknowledge your trust

In the Word of God

Take a moment to acknowledge your trust

In the Ways of God

Invite God to search your mind & heart

Proverbs says, "In all your ways submit to Him"

Search me oh God

Ask Him – is there any way in me

That needs submission to you?