

## Messages From Genesis “The Leah’s of Life”

In these messages from the book of Genesis we've seen how Jacob had to flee his home after cheating his twin brother Esau out of their dying father's blessing. Now a fugitive, he stops at a well to get a drink. Some other men come, and he finds out they know his mother's brother, Laban. As they are talking, Laban's daughter Rachel comes to the well, and it's there that Jacob starts to fall in love with Rachel. He's invited back to Laban's house to stay a while, and work there. After working a month for free, Laban says, "You ought to be paid. What shall your wages be?"

The next several verses say this: "Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful." It says "Leah's eyes were weak" (or "delicate"). We're not sure what the problem was. Perhaps it was an eye disease that disfigured her. Maybe she was cross-eyed. Whatever it was, it must have been a thing people noticed when they looked at her.

Rachel is described in a different way. We're told that she had a lovely figure and was beautiful.

Jacob is so infatuated with Rachel that he agrees to work for Laban *seven years* just for the right to marry Rachel! The story continues. "Laban said, 'It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; 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" (Genesis 29:19-20). I would say this man is truly in love!

But now the story gets really interesting! The seven years pass. Jacob has been counting the days. "Then Jacob said to Laban, 'Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed'" (Genesis 29:21). Laban, it's been 7 long years, man! Let's get this show on the road! But look at what happens! "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 in to her" (Genesis 19: 22-23)! He spent his honeymoon night with the wrong woman! Genesis 29:25 says: "When morning came, there was Leah!" Can you imagine Jacob's surprise when he woke up!

Now we may ask: how in the world could this happen? Couldn't he tell that the woman in bed with him wasn't Rachel? Remember: Women were veiled. And this is not the honeymoon suite in an Embassy Hotel – this was a tent, in the dark! And, well...maybe the wine that Jacob had drunk at the wedding festivities may have dulled his senses a bit!

Furious, Jacob heads out of the tent to find Laban: "What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me?" (Genesis 29:25b). "Why have you deceived me?" Ah! Jacob, the one who had deceived his blind father and stole the blessing - the deceiver is now deceived! And it doesn't feel so good, does it, Jacob!

Laban responds: "Well...uh...er...you see, we've got a custom here in this part of the country. We don't give our younger daughter in marriage before the older one." Okay...but wouldn't it

have been nice, Laban, if you had mentioned that to Jacob 7 years ago!

If you know the rest of the story, Jacob marries Leah, but he's also allowed to marry Rachel – even though he has to work another 7 years for his conniving father-in-law Laban.

Often when this story is told, it highlights Jacob's great love for Rachel, and how he was willing to work all those years for her. And that's all good, I suppose. *But today I'd like to focus on another character in the drama: Leah. What must it have been like to be Leah?* Always being compared to your knockout younger sister. Rachel, a perfect 10. Great figure. Drop-dead gorgeous. And you, the plain-Jane older sister with the weak eyes.

Leah was *used* by her father. A tool in dad's manipulative tool chest. Now we may ask, "Why did Leah allow her dad to do this?" Well, in those patriarchal days, children had few rights. Father had the power. Dad called the shots. Females were just regarded as property.

Imagine the spot Leah was thrown into. Going to bed with a guy who thinks you're someone else. Coming into the tent that night nervous, afraid. Knots in your stomach as you dread the next morning – knowing Jacob's going to see it's you, and go ballistic! Then getting married and sharing your husband with your favored sister, knowing he loves her, and not you.

Hardly anyone today has to go through exactly what Leah did. This is a story with a weird side to it. But in another sense, there's familiar stuff here. What Leah experienced may not be as uncommon as we may think!

*Leah was unwanted.* Jacob didn't really want her. And you kind of get the feeling that her father was trying to pawn this oldest daughter off on any man who'd have her.

Ever feel unwanted? Rejected? You go through a divorce and can feel that way. You lose your job, the company no longer needs you or wants you. You're not part of the "in group" in your neighborhood, or work place, or church. Life is full of Leahs – people who feel unwanted.

*Then too, Leah felt inadequate, overmatched, because she lacked physical beauty.* Always in the shadow of her "hot" younger sister Rachel, she was constantly reminded of her physical limitations and impediments.

Our American society is so big on looks – physical appearance. We constantly see beautiful women, handsome men on TV shows, in the movies, in advertisements. It's so easy to compare our own looks against Hollywood or TV stars. Some women were once surveyed and asked whether they would rather be very beautiful or very smart. The overwhelming majority said they would rather be beautiful. (Someone suggested the reason most women would rather be beautiful than smart is because they know the average man can *see* better than he can *think*!)

Our tendency to be displeased with our physical appearance and the way we look keeps the cosmetic industry alive and well, raking in billions of dollars!

A magazine had a picture of actress Michelle Pfeiffer on the cover. The caption at the top was, “What Michelle Pfeiffer needs”. And at the bottom it said, “Absolutely Nothing”. Well, it turns out, she did need something. A reporter got hold of the touch-up artist’s bill for the cover of the magazine. Here’s the breakdown on the work needed on the cover photo:

Clean up complexion, soften eye lines, soften smile line, add color to lips, trim chin, remove neck lines, soften lines under ear lobes, add highlights to earrings, add blush to cheek, clean up neck line, remove stray hair, remove hair strands on dress, adjust color and add hair on top of head, add dress on side to create better line, add forehead, add dress on shoulders, soften neck muscle a bit, clean up and smooth dress folds under arm. Total cost: \$1525.00.

We don’t know if Leah ever wished that God had made her prettier – but a lot of us wish God would have made us taller, or thinner, or with nicer hair, or a smaller nose....or whatever.

*Then also, Leah longed to be loved.* Leah’s longing for her husband’s love seeps through these verses in a poignant way. For a while, both Leah and Rachel are unable to bear any children for Jacob. But then Leah conceives. "When the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. Leah conceived and bore a son, and she named him Reuben, for she said, 'Because the Lord has looked on my affliction, surely now my husband will love me'" (Genesis 29:31-32). She names the boy *Reuben*. Reuben means “see” – the Lord has *seen* my misery, she thinks. And since bearing children was so important for Hebrews, she says, “Surely my husband will love me now”! Sorry, Leah.

The story continues: "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 named him Simeon" (Genesis 29:33). Simeon means “one who hears”. Rachel reasons, because the Lord has *heard* that I’m not loved maybe this will change how Jacob feels about me.

Then another son is born and she names him Levi – “attached” - “Now at last my husband will become *attached* to me, because I have borne him three sons” (Genesis 29:34). Can you sense the desperation here as she craves Jacob’s love?

There are a lot of Leahs like that: women, trying to lose weight, changing their hair style, dressing in a more sexy way, just to get an uninterested husband to love them. Children, desperately trying to capture a parent's attention and love. Elderly people, living alone or in a nursing home, feeling the world has forgotten them.

For some people, the longing to be loved can become a “love addiction”. A pastor tells how he and another pastor went downtown one night to speak to a group of single moms. They didn’t know what to expect, and they were shocked when they got there and found out the average age of this single mom’s group was about 17 years of age. Some had already had more than one child. After the pastors had spoken, a question and answer period followed. As the pastors talked and listened, it became apparent to the pastor relating this that none of those girls had ever

known love. They had been rejected at every turn in life. They all grew up without a father – and more than anything these young girls wanted to be loved. He says he heard story after story of how these women gave themselves sexually to this guy, and then that guy, thinking that by giving in that this would make him love her. Then they got pregnant, and the guy was off and out of their lives.

The Leah's of life! People – and those parts of all of us – that feel unwanted, inadequate, unloved.

Often, this results in our having feelings of low self-esteem, poor self-worth. Psychologists tell us that when we feel crappy about ourselves, and see ourselves as having little value or worth, it colors so much of what we do. Low self-esteem can be a root cause of all kinds of dysfunction: depression...lack of self-confidence...bullying behaviors...hypercritical attitudes ...physical illness... oversensitivity to what people think of us and feeling the need to please everybody. People with low self-esteem often get into addictions: drug dependency or alcoholism...addiction to shopping and overspending.

On the other hand, when we have a healthy self-esteem and value for ourselves, we are much happier inside, and do much better in our interpersonal relationships.

I want to close this message by saying this: *There is good news for the Leah's of life!* Go back to Genesis 29:31: “When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he enabled her to conceive”. There is a touch of grace tucked away in this verse. For Hebrew women, being able to bear a child was looked upon as a sign of God's blessing. *God acted to bring Leah a sense of value, a sense of being wanted and loved!*

Our Lord Jesus came into this world - the world He had made - and experienced put downs and rejection. In many ways, He was unwanted, unloved. The gospel writer John puts it this way: “He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him” (John 1:10-11). There it is! Jesus in many ways was unwanted, devalued, unloved.

But John continues: “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God” (John 1:12). Did you get that? When we receive Him, He gives us the right or power to be children of God – sons and daughters, adopted into God's royal family!

When our sense of worth is dependent on *ourselves and how people treat us*, we're on shaky ground, because sometimes we aren't valued, wanted, or loved. But when our sense of worth is rooted in *Jesus* – that we are loved by Christ, forgiven, and accepted into His family – no one can take that from us! The cure for all the Leah's of life is *the Lord, and His unchanging love for us!*

This is the message the church must communicate to a world where people are often looking for love in all the wrong places. Fred Craddock, author, preacher and seminary professor, told of

vacationing with his wife Nettie in the Smoky Mountains. While eating dinner in a restaurant outside of Gatlinburg, TN an elderly man approached his table. “Good evening,” the man said. Craddock says, “I said good evening.” “Are you on vacation?” the man asked. “Yes,” I said, but really under my breath I was saying, “It’s really none of your business.”

“Where are you from?” the man continued. “We’re from Oklahoma.” “What do you do in Oklahoma?” Under his breath Craddock was saying, “Leave us alone. We’re on vacation, and we don’t know who you are.” But he responded, “I am a Christian minister.” The man asked, “What church?” “The Christian Church.” The elderly gentleman paused for a moment, then said, “I owe a great deal to a minister of the Christian Church,” and with that he pulled out a chair and sat down. Craddock relates, “I said, ‘Yes, sit down’”, and tried to act sincere, but I thought, “Who is this person?”

“I grew up in these mountains,” the man went on. “My mother was not married, and the whole community knew it. I was an illegitimate child. In those days that was a shame, and I was ashamed. The reproach that fell on her of course fell also on me.

"When I went into town with her, I could see people staring at me, making guesses as to who my father was. At school the children said ugly things to me, and so I stayed to myself during recess, and I ate my lunch alone. In my early teens I began to attend a little church back in the mountains called Laurel Springs Christian Church. It had a minister who was both attractive and frightening. He had a chiseled face and a heavy beard and a deep voice. I went to hear him preach. I don’t know exactly why, but it did something for me. However, I was afraid I was not welcome since I was illegitimate. So I would go just in time for the sermon, and when it was over I would move out because I was afraid that someone would say, ‘What’s a boy like you doing in church?’

“One Sunday some people lined up in the aisle before I could get out, and I was stopped. Before I could make my way through the group, I felt a hand on my shoulder, a heavy hand. I cut my eyes around and caught a glimpse of his beard and his chin, and I knew who it was. I trembled in fear. He turned his face around so that he could see mine and seemed to be staring at it for a while. I knew what he was doing. He was going to make a guess at who my father was.

“A moment later he said, ‘Well boy, you’re a child of...’ He paused there. And I knew it was coming. I knew I would have my feelings hurt. I knew I would not go back again. He said, ‘Boy, you are a child of God. I see a striking resemblance, boy.’ Then he swatted me on the bottom and said, ‘Now you go and claim your inheritance.’ I left the building a different person. In fact, that was really the beginning of my life.”

Fred Craddock says, “I was so moved by the story I had to ask him, ‘What’s your name?’” He said, “Ben Hooper.” Craddock says, “I recalled, though vaguely, my own father talking when I was just a child about how the people of Tennessee had twice elected as their *governor* an illegitimate child – Ben Hooper.

See, God has a word of hope and encouragement for all the Leah’s of life: No matter what the world thinks of you, through our Lord Jesus, you can be a child of God, valued, beautiful, loved!

