

INTRO

We have just heard the story of Jacob and his marrying of Leah and then Rachel.

JACOB'S INHERITANCE¹

But let me catch you up in the story because it is important for us understanding it correctly.

Jacob was a twin. His brother was Esau and his father was Isaac. When these boys were born God spoke through a prophecy that the elder boy (Esau) would serve the younger boy (Jacob) (Genesis 25:23). This was a reversal of the normal pattern and Isaac ignored it. He favoured his elder boy Esau – and because of this favouritism Esau grew up spoilt and wilful and impulsive, while Jacob grew up cynical and bitter.

When the time came for Isaac to pass on the family blessing he intended to give it to Esau. But Isaac dressed up as Esau, made some food and gave it to his father. Isaac gave the blessing to Jacob without realising what he was doing. But when Esau found out he was furious and vowed to kill his brother, and mother scuttled Jacob off to go and live with her relative Laban.

So Jacob's life was in ruins – no family, no inheritance, he would not see his mother or father alive again!

JACOB FLEES

Hi uncle Laban hires him as a shepherd and when he realises that he is very good at what he is doing he offers to pay him to be in charge of all his flocks. And his answer was just one word: Rachel.

Genesis 29:16-20 Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. 17 Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel was lovely in form, and beautiful. 18 Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, "I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel." 19 Laban said, "It's better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me." 20 So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.

It may interest you to know that in the original Hebrew it literally says that Rachel had a great figure and on top of that was beautiful. And just notice how love sick he is – since when does seven years feel like 7 days! Well that's how much he loved her! **And** in that society at that time

¹ I have closely followed chapter 2 of Tim Keller's book 'Counterfeit Gods'

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it was super uncommon to 'marry for love'. You would normally marry for status and family coalition. **And** it was not a small sum of money he forfeited – 7 years pay. **And** (this is the best part) after the seven years Jacob comes to Laban and says "Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to lie with her." That's pretty graphic and blunt and direct. Imagine going to your future father-in-law and saying: it is time; I want to have sex with your daughter!

Why did he have this emotional and sexual longing? He had never had his father's love, he lost his mother's love, and seem to have no sense of God's love. But THEN he saw the most beautiful woman he had ever had the privilege of laying eyes on! And he thought, 'If I had her, she would fix everything; she would make everything okay; she would give meaning and value and worth to my life.

And he is by no means alone in that longing. In fact this story may be 5000 years old but it rings true for us today. Many people still look to sex and romance to give them a transcendent sense of meaning that we should get from God alone. Here is what I mean:

- Why is it that the music and movie industry are obsessed with love songs and romantic comedies?
- Why does a beautiful woman who could almost pick any guy she wanted stay in an abusive relationship? Eg Rihanna and Eminem song 'Love the way it hurts'
- Why do guys bounce from relationship to relationship (or have affairs) as if woman are notched to be gathered on a belt, treating a woman as a commodity to help him feel desirable and powerful?
- If you find your soul-mate then everything wrong and painful in your life will be healed. No, even if your marriage is a match made in heaven – it is still worked out here on the earth.
- Why is there a trillion dollar industry pornography for? People are looking for the ultimate erotic, sexual fantasy experience. But it eludes them.
- Why do older men leave their faithful wife of many years for a much younger woman, in a desperate attempt to hide the fact that they are aging?

JACOB TRAPPED

Laban was an unscrupulous opportunist. And he noticed Jacob's vulnerability to romantic and sexual love. He allowed Jacob to work four times as long as you would normally for a bride. And

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he was deliberately vague about their agreement. He says, 'It's better that I give her to you than to some other man' (Gen 29:19). And Jacob hears the 'yes' that he wants to hear. But all Laban had really said was, 'I think it is a good idea that you marry Rachel.'

So after the seven years of service he comes to get his bride. They have a lavish wedding feast, it is night time, Leah is heavily veiled and Jacob could have been a bit tipsy! He sleeps with his new bride – only to find the next morning that it is the unattractive older daughter Leah!

Jacob, shaking with anger says, 'What have you one to me?' Laban argues that he should have known the custom in their land – an older sister must be married before a younger! And he 'graciously' agrees to allow Jacob to work another seven years for Rachel.

THE LOVE DRUG

But how is it that Jacob can be so love sick that he agrees to 14 years of labour for one woman! What happened to him happens to many other people in this life. He staked his hopes on Rachel – she was his hope for acceptance, meaning and love.

Song by Ke\$ha

*Maybe I need some rehab,
Or maybe just need some sleep
I've got a sick obsession,
I'm seeing it in my dreams*

*I'm looking down every alley,
I'm making those desperate calls
I'm staying up all night hoping,
Hit my head against the walls*

*What you've got boy is hard to find
Think about it all about it all the time
I'm all strung up my heart is fried
I just can't get you off my mind*

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Because your love, your love, your love, is my drug

Your love your love your love

I said your love, your love, your love, is my drug

Your love your love your love

I don't care what people say

The rush is worth the price I pay

I get so high when you're with me

But crash and crave you when you leave

He wanted and needed Rachel in such a profound way that he heard and saw what he wanted to! As the saying goes, 'He worshipped the ground she walked on'.

LEAH: THE CASUALTY

The saddest thing in this story is what happens to Leah. She is the unattractive cross-eyed sister. Laban was a man – he knew that no man would ever offer to marry Leah. He had probably wondered for years how he was going to get rid of her, so that her sister could be wed and he could get a fine price. And then the opportunity presented itself.

But notice what happened to Leah: she goes from been the daughter that her father never wanted to been the wife that her husband never wanted! Genesis 29:30 says, 'Jacob... loved Rachel more than Leah'. She was the girl that nobody wanted. And so what is her response? She does exactly that what Jacob has been doing. She tries to get the love of Jacob, hoping that this will give her a sense of worth and value.

Genesis 29:31 When the LORD saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. 32 Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him **Reuben**, for she said, "It is because the LORD has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now." 33 She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Because the LORD heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too." So she named him **Simeon**. 34 Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." So he was

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named **Levi**. 35 She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "This time I will praise the LORD." So she named him **Judah**. Then she stopped having children.

She names her first son Reuben which means 'to see': maybe my husband will see me now, I won't be invisible. She names her second son Simeon which means 'to hear': maybe now my husband will listen to me. She has a third son called Levi which means 'to be attached': maybe through this child my husband will finally attach his heart to me.

Her fourth and final child she calls Judah which means praise. But this time it is different. She had thought: 'If I have babies and raise a family and give my husband a legacy he will love me – and I will finally have the acceptance, happiness and identity I have been longing for.' But that never happened. But in verse 35 we read that her hope moves... Read

Here is the point: trying to find fulfilment in sex and love is just one example mankind's many searches for happiness and a sense of value. Every time you say, 'If I can just get Rachel, everything will be okay'. Jacob goes to bed with 'Rachel', but in the morning it is Leah. With the greatest respect to woman, no matter what you put your hope in, in the morning it is always Leah not Rachel.

If you marry, putting all your deepest hopes and longing on that person, you are going to crush him or her with divine expectations. If you put your hope in money – that it will bring you security and a good life; if you put your hope in success – that it will give you the respect, acclaim and power you want; if you put your hope in pleasure – going from one 'living life to the full' experience to the next; if you put your hope in your children – living off their success and accomplishments... it will be Leah in the morning not Rachel!

Why? This is the cosmic disappointment of sin. Sin is trying to make good things into ultimate things, good things into god things – hoping that they will do for you what God alone is able to do. That is sin as idolatry – putting something in the place that God alone deserves.

CONCLUSION

Jacob is after life-changing-sex, Leah is after trying to find her identity in having babies and being a good wife. To make a generalisation: men use love to get sex, women use sex to get love. And this story shows how both of these counterfeit gods disappoint.

So what are you looking to to validate your life? Leah got her life back when she looked to God – when she realised that ONLY God was sufficient, and could fulfil all of her longings. That last

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son, Judah, was the great, great great, great grandfather of Jesus Christ. Jesus came truly as the man that no-one wanted – born in a manger; he had no beauty in him to attract us to him; he came to his own (Jews) but his own did not receive him; in the end he was abandoned to the cross when he hung alone dying for the sins of the world, crying out, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’

Why? Did he become the son nobody wanted? For you and me. He took the sins of the world on himself as he died on the cross in our place. And if we are deeply moved by that ultimate display of self-sacrificial love and grace then we will detach our hearts from other false saviours. We will stop trying to save ourselves through relationships or money or sex or power or pleasure or success. We would stop because we already have a Saviour who satisfies those longings.