

Loved Like Rachel

Genesis 29-30

INTRODUCTION: Most of us live with a quiet fear we rarely name. The fear is not that we will fail. The fear is that we will do everything right...and still be overlooked - ***it's the fear of being UNSEEN that haunts us most.***

A Gallup study on employee engagement consistently finds that lack of recognition is among the *top three reasons* people disengage from work. 60–70% of employees say they feel *undervalued or unseen* at work. Disengagement is not driven primarily by failure, but by effort without acknowledgment.

And it is not just in work, it is true of marriage and family - you see, Humans measure worth **relationally**, not **objectively**. In other words, we seek validation by comparing our value with our perceptions of the value attributed to others.

A wife doesn't want to just know that her husband finds her attractive; she wants to be the "*Lily in the Valley*," the "*Rose among Thorns*". You see? Men, if your wife says, "Do you think I'm pretty?" and you say, "Yes," That is ultimately not the answer she is looking for - she is looking for, "Many women have done well, but you, my love, exceed them all.

In other words, do you see her unique beauty? Do you find her uniquely attractive? Do you see her that way?

It's the fear of being UNSEEN that haunts us most.

That someone else will be chosen. That someone else will be prettier, louder, smarter, easier to love. And that one morning, we will wake up next to a life we never wanted—wondering how we got here.

Volumes of commentary and insights may be derived from any particular passage of scripture. But, for the sake of a sermon, a particular perspective must be chosen. That perspective identifies who **WE** are in the passage.

ILLUSTRATION: The story of David and Goliath reads differently when you realize you aren't David facing down your giant; you are one of the hundreds of Hebrew soldiers trembling on the sidelines while God's Anointed defeats the Giant on your behalf vicariously on your behalf.

I normally prefer to conceal **OUR** role in the narrative and allow us to all discover it together, but this passage is too important and too consequential for us to risk missing it. You see - Genesis 29 is not a romance. It's a warning. And this story is not mainly about Jacob or Rachel; this story is about **Leah**. And if we're honest, this story is about

us. We are a room filled with LEAHS in a RACHEL world. We are those who are haunted by a fear that things might not work out. As we stand on the precipice of this new year, the text gives us a secret as to how we may **FEEL LIKE LEAH, but be LOVED LIKE RACHEL.** Let's dive in together.

CONTEXT: As you remember, the last time we were in the text together, we saw Jacob heeding the advice of his mother and his father, fleeing from Esau, whose only consolation in life was the fact that he might soon kill Jacob.

Jacob fled, robbed in the shame of deceit under the shadow of cowardice, lay his head upon a rock, and he slept. He encountered the GOD of Abraham and Isaac. Yaweh reaffirmed that in spite of his scheming, the covenant promise to Abraham still remains; if Jacob were faithless, God would be faithful. He reaffirmed His Divine intention to bless Jacob with a nation of people.

This week, we see Jacob arriving in Haran. As he enters the city, he meets a group of shepherds who have come down to water their sheep. He asks the shepherds...

TEXT: Genesis 29:1–12 (ESV)

¹ Then Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the east. ² As he looked, he saw a well in the field,

As we have said previously, wells are indicators of civilization - someone had forged that well. So, Jacob knew he had found people, but were they HIS people?

^{2b.} 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, ³ 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. ⁴ Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where do you come from?" They said, "We are from Haran." ⁵ He said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" They said, "We know him." ⁶ He said to them, "Is it well with him?" They said, "It is well; and see, Rachel his daughter is coming with the sheep!"

Now, if this were a movie... the camera would focus and zoom in on this shepherdess named Rachel. Gal Gadot would play Rachel. Her hair would be blowing in the wind, and really awesome music would start playing in the background.

¹⁰ 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 well's mouth and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother.

Now, think of what we know of Jacob at this point. He's not a manly sort of guy; he is really into HGTV, he loves a good green tea, and he wears a lot of beige. Just a couple of weeks ago, he was playing dress-up with his mother in an attempt to fool his father. But now, he's rolling stones away from wells. There is something about

love that can bring stuff out of a man that nobody knew was there. I've seen a good woman have that effect on a man.

¹¹ Then Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud. ¹² And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman, and that he was Rebekah's son, and she ran and told her father. ¹³ 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, ¹⁴ and Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh!" And he stayed with him a month. ¹⁵ Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" ¹⁶ Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷ Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance.

Now, keep in mind that beauty is different in every culture, and it really is in the eye of the beholder.

- For example, in some cultures, tan skin is considered beautiful, and people will risk cancer to have it. In other cultures, tan skin is regarded as a curse for poor laborers. In the Song of Solomon, the tanned Shulamite apologizes because she had a really great tan.

So, trust God with your physical appearance. He has His reasons - you were knit together in a specific way for a specific reason - it's ok to try to look your best according to cultural norms, but don't obsess over it.

Theologians don't really know what is meant by that phrase, "Weak eyes" but whatever it means, Leah did not fit the cultural norms of what is considered beautiful.

¹⁸ Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." ¹⁹ Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." 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.

So that was the deal they struck - You serve as a part of my staff for Seven Years - in return, Rachel is yours for life. Which seemed like a great deal to Jacob, he was in limerance - all of the feel-good chemicals were firing - dopamine, serotonin, norepinephrine... which, by the way, is not a great state to be in when you are negotiating a legally binding contract...

WEDDING - Now the time had come for Jacob and Rachel to be married. The wedding feast would have lasted seven days; there would be feasting, there would be drinking, and there would be celebration. All of the festivities would have concluded by the *consummation* of the relationship in the marriage tent.

So see it there, music fills the air, everyone has had a bit too much to drink, the flicker of torches just outside the tent as the groom takes the bride inside for the

“honeymoon”. The next morning, as the sun rises and the rooster crows, the newly married Jacob awakes and looks over at his brand new bride....

25 And in the morning, behold, it was Leah!

Now that verse always gets a laugh... it was funny... to everyone but Jacob. Jacob goes to Laban, and they have an old-fashioned come-to-Jesus moment...

25b. 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?”

Note the irony of this passage. What had Jacob been known for? Deception! And now he is reaping what he has sown. Laban has a story ready...

26 Laban said, “It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn.

Ah, Jacob had failed to read the fine print... and now he is furious that someone would have the nerve to send him into a tent as if they were a totally different person in order to deceive him... and that simply so that they could get a better deal.

He must have had flashbacks to when he dressed up to deceive his poor, blind father.

Laban says - 27 Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.” 28 Jacob did so, and completed her week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. 29 (Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant.)

So in a span of a week, Jacob takes two wives, the Beautiful Rachel and very ordinary Leah.

30 So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years.

Now, remember, we saw in the story of Jacob and Esau that scripture uses the words “love and hate” to show preference and favor. So Isaac loved (or favored) Esau, Rebecca loved (or favored) Isaac. We are told in the NT that God loved (or favored) Isaac but hated (or didn’t favor) Esau.

Now here we are told that Isaac LOVES (or favors) Rachel. Then notice in verse 31...

31 When the Lord saw that Leah was hated,

In other words, she wasn’t preferred; she wasn’t favored. She was in a marriage bereft of love - but listen in moments like these - trust God, he is not asleep. Look what happens:

31b. he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren.

In this culture, the ability to bear children was the greatest advantage. Your children were your social security; they were your retirement plan. To have no children was a very hopeless situation.

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; for now my husband will love me."

Reuben means - I am seen. Have you ever felt “unseen”? Like, people didn’t recognize what you brought to the table? That is a horrible feeling. It robs you of the innate value God places in every individual.

IN 2026, I want people who worship with this congregation to know that we see them. *Who around you needs to be seen today?*

The ability to bear children made Leah feel like she was finally going to be seen. Now, at last, I have the advantage... now I will experience what Rachel has experienced all her life... the loving admiration of my husband. ***But the text gives no indication that anything had changed.... Leah gave Jacob Reuben, but his eyes were still fixed on Rachel.***

33 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.

Simeon means - I am Heard. Now perhaps, her voice would be precious in the ears of Jacob. She gave Jacob a second child - SIMEON; ***But the text does not indicate that anything had changed....Leah gave Jacob a Reuben and a Simeon, yet she still feels invisible and silent.***

34 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.

Levi means I'm attached. My Labrador retriever is named Levi, and that is a fitting name because he is certainly attached to our family. And something about the birth of this third son awakened the hope in Leah’s heart that NOW Jacob would find her endearing....Surely this would secure her place in the heart and mind of her husband... three son. ***But the text does not indicate that anything had changed....Leah gave Jacob a Reuben, a Simeon, and a Levi, yet she still feels invisible, silent, and unwanted.***

At times she was seen, but unheard, or heard but unwanted, or seen and heard but sensed a detachment from the one she needed love from the most.

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN THERE? Have you done the best you could do but felt like, for some reason, it just wasn't good enough?

What have you given birth to to be seen, heard, or attached?

- **Achievement** to be seen -
- **Drama** to be heard
- **Relational Attachment** to be connected

Let's be real - We live on the coast of Florida, this is a resort community. You would live here if you hadn't done all right for yourself. In fact, many of you are living the American Dream. Nevertheless, therapists and counselors have lines of people waiting to help them figure out why they are so sad and depressed.

I wonder if there is anyone here who feels - unseen, unheard, unwanted... in spite of all you have delivered? If that's the case - I have good news for you... Your heart is fertile soil to conceive a Judah.

³⁵ 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.

By the time this fourth child was born, Leah had ceased seeking her fulfillment in Jacob's attention; she now turns her gaze to a more trustworthy source. In fact, when it came to the naming of Judah, Jacob is not even mentioned.

Judah means “Praise the Lord”, but the word for Lord she uses is interesting. Most of the time in the OT, we have seen the name Elohim. Elohim is the generic form of “G-o-d”. It was used by various religions to refer to the most high God.

But then there was the name **Yaweh**, this was the name God gave to Abraham when he made a covenant with him. This was the name used by those who had a unique relationship with God, his covenant people.

Leah came to the place in her life where God became more than a concept - **Elohim, now he was a friend, Yaweh.**

No matter how hard she tried, she could not be good enough for Jacob. But the good news is God is attracted to certain people as well, but it's not by looks, not by talent, not by wealth, not by IQ. Do you know who God is really attracted to? **People in difficult situations.**

Psalm 34:18 – “*The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.*”

Psalm 51:17 – “*A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*”

Psalm 138:6 – “*For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar.*”

Psalm 147:3–6 – “*He heals the brokenhearted... The LORD lifts up the humble.*”

Isaiah 57:15 – “*I dwell... with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit.*”

Isaiah 66:2 – “*This is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit.*”

Isaiah 61:1 – “*The LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.*”
(Later applied directly to Jesus)

Matthew 5:3 – “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*”

Matthew 11:28–29 – “*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden... for I am gentle and lowly in heart.*”

Matthew 18:4 – “*Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*”

James 4:6 – “*God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.*”

Isaiah 42:2–3 (ESV)

² He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; ³ a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench;

A BROKEN REED HE WILL NOT BREAK... All along the Jordan at many different places, cattails grow.... A reed comes up, and the cattail grows; the reed would be hollow. They would cut the reed while it was green, let it dry, then bore holes in it to make flutes. Often they would try to cut it down, but because it was green, it wasn't easy to cut; it would give, so it was easy to bruise; it would turn a darker green and have to be discarded. It was useless; it wouldn't play. They would take it, throw it on the ground, and crush it underfoot. That would say to the others following after: just ignore this one; it's worthless, it's useless, it's been bruised... ***Jesus shall not break the bruised reed.***

A FAINTLY BURNING WICK... They would crush those reeds underfoot, let them dry, twist them together, and make a cord out of them. That small rope was a wick... they dipped it down in oil. As it got old and the oil soaked in, it got to the point where it was useless; it would put off black smoke. And smoke up the house and have a very pungent smell. They would throw it out and crush it underfoot. They were saying this cord is double useless... It couldn't be played as a flute; it couldn't be made into a wick.

THE IRONY OF GRACE IS THAT CHRIST PREFERS THE BRUISED REED AND THE SMOLDERING WICK. HE CAN USE RACHEL, BUT HE IS REALLY INTO LEAH!

Before JACOB, she's **reaching**. After JUDAH, she is **resting**. BTW, have you met the Lion of the Tribe of Judah? He loves LEAHS.

ILLUSTRATION: As a matter of fact, if there are some among us who have everything going for them - they are attractive, intelligent, wealthy... we ought to have an invitation just for them and pray that they'd get more ugly, less smart, and lose their money. why? It's difficult for them to get close to God... they don't "feel" the need.

Romans 5:3–5 (ESV)

3 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

CONCLUSION/INVITATION:

Praise in the midst of difficulty is the ultimate expression of faith, and the only thing that can break the cycle of comparison.

By giving this child the name **Judah**, Leah was testifying - I am no longer looking for fulfillment in being seen, or being heard, or being attached.... Now I'm looking for fulfillment in God alone. **Leah stopped naming her PAIN and started naming her GOD!**

Leah - the unwanted becomes the great, great, great, grandmother of Jesus. Jesus was the Lion of the tribe of Judah.... It was when she turned her focus from worldly things to God that God shaped her identity into something amazing.

It was only when Leah recognized that and turned her focus to God that she found herself woven into the story of Jesus.

You see, we are Leah, but we are loved like Rachel - God calls us to look to him, follow him, stop looking sideways at everyone else. Stop worrying about whether they see you. Do they affirm you? Do they accept you? Look to a God that loves you with an everlasting love.