

13.4.25 pm

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Date: 13 April 2025

Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 00] If you could turn back, please, with me to the passage that we read. Let's ask for God's help as we go there once more.

! Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the word that we have sung that reminds us that you are the God who is gracious and merciful and loving and kind and good.

And slow to anger. We thank you, Lord, that you are the God that we see at work, even behind the scenes in the story that we've been tracking through Genesis.

And we thank you that you are the God who does not change, that you are the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. And you are our God and our King.

And we pray that you would help us as we sing, as we pray, as we meditate upon your word and as we respond to your word. Help us to worship you, to trust you, to obey you and to seek to glorify you through our lives.

[1 : 13] So meet with us, we pray, in the word. Speak to our hearts. Give us understanding in our minds. And bless us, we pray.

And what we pray for ourselves here, we pray for others who meet as we do. We pray on for other denominations here, the congregations around us, as your word is opened.

We pray that as the gospel is preached, that you would be at work building your church, Lord Jesus, drawing many people to saving faith in you.

And as we prayed in the morning, we pray again this evening for Scott and ask, Lord, that as he preaches in Cope Ridge today, that you would equip him, that you would be near to him, and that he would know your help and your presence.

And we commit to him and the family to you at this time. So hear our prayers and help us as we look to you. And we ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Sometimes we can get involved in a job, and the job goes bad.

[2 : 26] I was thinking back many years to a job like that that I was involved with in Leeds, with a contractor that I've long since gone bust called Reflex Action.

And I can remember the contracts manager in the firm I was working for coming in, full of excitement about this new contractor, this new contact, these two or three big jobs that were coming off, the first job being in Leeds.

And he was full of enthusiasm. And the rest of us, as we were listening to him, and as we were trying to get a bit of a picture of this contractor, we weren't quite so sure about them.

And our feelings proved to be correct because within a very short space of time, the job was going badly. Our guys were not getting directions.

They weren't getting paid. And all we wanted to do as a project team was get our guys off the site and just be done with the job and be done with the contractor.

[3 : 39] So sometimes you can get bad jobs. That goes with a big contracting job. It can also go just with a simple DIY project. We begin these DIY projects full of optimism.

Some people do. I never even begin them. That's how bad I am. But those of you who've got a bit more adventurous spirit than me, you start these jobs full of optimism. But very quickly with DIY projects, things start to go wrong.

You know, you take the plaster off the wall and you discover that the beams are wet and the floor is rotten and the wiring needs replaced. And you just wish you'd never start it.

You just want to walk away. And we can be thankful tonight that we worship the God who isn't like us in these respects.

We worship the God who doesn't walk away when things go bad. And think about that even in terms of a short trip through Genesis.

[4 : 48] Genesis chapter 1. God made the world. And it was good. In fact, it was very good. But by Genesis 3, there was the fall.

And things were not good. By Genesis 4, we have the first murder. By Genesis 6, things are so bad in the world that God brings judgment through the flood.

Surely now, these created beings would learn. But very clearly, as we track through Genesis, we can see that the flood didn't wash away the mess of sin.

Pretty soon things were just as bad again. And if we fast forward, I'm not going to do a survey through Genesis, but let's get to the passage we actually read.

We fast forward to Genesis 29. What we can see is that things are bad in the world, and things are bad, not just in the world, but things are bad in the lives of God's own people.

[6 : 04] It's a mess. But the amazing thing is that God doesn't walk away.

And he doesn't write off these people. He doesn't hit the reset button. But as we sang, he is patient, and he is kind, and he is good, and he is merciful, and he is gracious.

So what I'd like to do tonight in the time that we have is think about what God is like in his nature.

You know, if we were to focus tonight on the characters in the story, on the people, or if we were to focus exclusively on the plot, we're going to come in here, we're going to leave here more depressed than we were when we came in.

Because this is a difficult chapter to read. This whole section is a difficult section in Genesis to read. It's dark. But against the dark backdrop of this story, we see the beauty of God.

This is the God, remember, who calls us to trust him. This is the God who is trustworthy, and who is worthy of our worship. So two points tonight.

[7 : 32] First point is God is fair. And the second point is God is full of love and kindness. So first of all, God is fair.

That's verses 31 to verse 35. We'll just read these verses again. 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.

[8 : 40] Now the first thing I wanted to highlight, as we look at this section, is we're told here that, in verse 31, the Lord saw Leah.

And specifically, the Lord saw that Leah was hated. She was hated by the people who should have loved her. So just as a quick recap, who was Leah, and why was she hated?

Well, Leah, remember, is the older daughter of Laban. And Leah is the wife that Jacob was tricked into marrying. And I'm not going to go back into that story.

You can read that story in the earlier part of Genesis 29. So Leah has been caught in this huge mess. Her father has used her to benefit his own business.

He's traded her for seven years of hard labor from Jacob. And Jacob is stuck with her.

[9 : 50] Jacob, he doesn't love her. He is her reluctant husband. So how does Leah feel in the middle of all this mess?

Well, we're told in verse 32 that she feels afflicted. She's suffering. And she feels affliction.

She feels afflicted. And no one else seems to notice. But God notices. He sees Leah.

He sees her affliction. And so verse 31 tells us, he opened her womb, and she has four sons.

And with the birth of each son, she acknowledges the Lord. One commentator, Eveson, says, the word plays on the names revealed her gratitude to God for his goodness.

[11 : 00] Reuben means see a son. The Lord has surely looked on my affliction. She called the second Simeon, which means heard, because the Lord has heard he has therefore given me this son also.

When the fourth son, Judah, was born, says Eveson, she exclaimed, now I will praise the Lord. So, thinking particularly about the character and the nature of God, what can we learn about God's character in all this dark story?

Well, one thing that we can see at this juncture is that God sees the people that others overlook. At this point, we can say this about God's nature.

He sees the people that others overlook when they are afflicted. God cares for the people that seem to be unloved. God treats and God is fair when others are not fair.

God treats justly those who are not treated justly by others. Dale Ralph Davis says this, when Yahweh, when the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb.

[12:33] Here, says Ralph Davis, is the God who is at work and who shows that he is for the despised. He is for the neglected, the wronged, the used.

So Leah gives birth and, among others, bears the forerunners of the priestly and kingly tribes. Levi, at verse 34, Judah, at verse 35.

And then Ralph Davis says, is this not a bit of the justice, the fairness of God? So we see here that God is fair.

We see that in his dealings with Leah. And that's something that we can be encouraged by because there may have been times in our lives, there may still yet be times in our lives, we may even be in some kind of affliction at this point, and there may be occasions in life where we feel something like Leah.

There can be seasons in life where we may feel overlooked, we may feel unfairly treated, we may feel unloved, and we may wonder if anyone sees us or cares.

[13:58] well, Leah shows us that God cares, that he sees our situation like no one else does, that he knows us.

We sang about that in Psalm 139. And we can ask him to help us when we're afflicted. We can ask him to help us when we feel that we are being treated unfairly, and he will hear, and he will help.

It struck me in preparation that there was only one prayer that we can go to and think of that God heard, but did not answer. There was only one person who was utterly forsaken, only one person whom God the Father could not and would not look upon.

We sang about it, the Father turned his face away, and he turned his face away from his Son, the Lord Jesus.

on the cross, he was forsaken, so that we would never be forsaken. He was treated unjustly, so that we would not have to face the justice of God, the punishment for our sin, because he took it.

[15:38] And so, the cross, that place that we come back to week by week by week, is the place where we can see that God is fair, as Christ takes the wrath that our sins deserved, and yet the cross is the place that we see that God is full of loving kindness.

And that's our second and final point. God is fair, point number one. Point number two, God is full of loving kindness. And as we move on to chapter 30, the camera you could say, shifts from Leah to Rachel.

And in verse 1, it says, when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister.

So, a quick recap again. Who was Rachel?

Well, Rachel was the wife that Jacob loved. He was the younger daughter of Laban. He was the...

So, Rachel was the wife that Jacob wanted and that he loved.

And the fact that she was loved by her husband made her happy. But at this point, Rachel couldn't have children, verse 31. And that made her sad.

[16:54] And that also made her envious of Jacob's other wife, Leah, who also happened to be her older sister.

So, as we look in on this, and as we think about this, we would immediately ask, how could Jacob have two wives?

And the answer to that question is, well, the law in that place at that time allowed that. But the law was not in sync with God's design. God's design from Genesis chapter 2 was to be, and it still is to be, that marriage is to be between one man and one woman.

And to deviate from that was to go down a road of sin, and it was to go down a whole road of strife. And that's what we see unfolding.

So she, Rachel, said to Jacob, her husband, give me children, or I shall die. Jacob's anger was kindled, verse 2, against Rachel, and he said, am I in the place of God who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?

[18:17] Ralph Davis makes a comment here, Jacob scores high on theology, but low on sensitivity. He's speaking the truth, but he's speaking the truth without love and sensitivity.

sensitivity. And so there's a fight. And then Rachel comes up with a plan because she is desperate at this point to have a family.

Rachel suggests verse 3, if you just follow through the verses with me, I don't have time to read them, I'm just going to scan through them. Rachel in verse 3 suggests that her servant girl, Bilhah, is used by Jacob to be a surrogate mother.

And so that's what happens. And you can see that from verse 3 down to verse 8. Jacob is with Bilhah and she has two sons, one is called Dan, one is called Naphtali.

So that was her plan. Was it a wise plan? No, it wasn't a wise plan. So what should Jacob have done in this situation? Well, he should have actually stood up to Rachel and said, this is not a wise plan.

[19 : 26] James Montgomery Boyce, says, Jacob should have said, no, this is not something we should do. I know it is permitted under the laws of our time, but matters like this are not of God, and we should simply pray and ask God to give you children.

Jacob did not do that. Or if he did, he was overpowered by Rachel's persistence. She was not trusting God, and like Sarah of old, she therefore moved to take matters into her own hands.

So things were bad. bad. But they're going to get worse. Because now Leah, who's looking in on her sister, who's now producing a family, albeit through this servant girl, Leah, who has now stopped having children herself, naturally, she decides she wants to have more children.

So she comes up with the same plan, and she goes into competition, she starts to wrestle with her sister. Leah suggests that her servant girl Zilpah is used by Jacob to be a surrogate mother, and so that's what happens in verses 9 through to verse 13.

Jacob is with Zilpah, and she has two sons. First is Gad, and the second is Asher. So the wives are at war.

[20 : 47] And now little Reuben is drawn into the conflict, and an even stranger twist in the story.

Verse 14, in the days of the wheat harvest, Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah.

You might wonder what on earth are mandrakes. I wondered the same thing when I first read it. I was picturing little ducks that maybe he was going to take home for dinner, but that's not what they are.

Mandrakes were a blue-colored plant. They were rare in that area. They produced a yellow fruit.

They had a strong scent. And it's very unlikely that Reuben knew what he had picked and brought home to his mother, but basically these mandrakes were drugs.

Singlar Ferguson said they had a narcotic influence. Singlar Ferguson said you could tune in and drop out on a few mandrakes.

[21 : 56] So these mandrakes were drugs and they were believed to increase fertility. They improved the chances of someone having children.

That's what they thought. And so there was great interest in the mandrakes amongst these two sisters. Then Rachel verse 14 said to Leah, please give me some of your son's mandrakes.

But she said to her, is it a small matter that you've taken away my husband? Would you take away also my son's mandrakes? And so there's another battle, another flare-up. And now Rachel agrees to trade a knight with Jacob for the mandrakes.

Rachel said, then he may lie with you tonight in exchange for your son's mandrakes. Verse 16, when Jacob came in from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, you must come in to me, for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes.

And so he lay with her that night. And there's sort of echoes here of Jacob's past catching up with him. If you were to rewind to Genesis 25, don't go there just now, but you can look later.

[23 : 12] In Genesis 25, Jacob, remember, he tricked his brother Esau into trading his birthright for a pot of stew. And now Jacob, in chapter 30, is the one who is being traded.

So, just to bring this to a conclusion and to summarize what we've read over the last 25 minutes, what we see is a mess.

It's a mess on multiple levels. We see envy, we see bitter rivalry, there is a disregard for God's law, there's deceit, there's even drugs.

It's more like an episode of EastEnders than it is a Bible story. And the question I want to finish with is, how will God respond to all us?

The God who sees all of this, the God who knows not only the facts, not only everything that's said, but he sees the motivation, he understands all the thoughts that's passing through the minds.

[24 : 40] How is he going to respond to this mess? Surely, we think now, his patience has run out. Surely, it's time for God to show them his righteousness.

anger. But no, what we see in response as we finish is that God is full of love and kindness and grace.

Because in verse 17, it says that God listened to Leah, even though Leah doesn't seem to be listening to God.

God, God And in verse 18, against all the odds, she has another son, Issachar. Verse 19 to 20, she has another son, Zebulun.

Verse 21, she bears a daughter, Dinah. So, God is full of love and kindness towards Leah. And then in verse 22, it says, God remembered Rachel, even though Rachel doesn't seem to remember God.

[25 : 56] And God listened to her. And miraculously, she who was barren bore a son called Joseph.

And as the commentator Eveson says, there is something special about Joseph. As the closing chapters of Genesis will emphasize, Joseph points to the great deliverer to come.

And yet that great deliverer, Jesus, interestingly, he doesn't come through the line of Rachel, the pretty one.

He comes through the line of Leah, the weaker of the sisters. Dugod, the commentator, says, although Joseph would be greatly used by God to bring deliverance to all his brothers, the Messiah would come through the line of Leah's son, Judah.

God is no respecter of persons. He chooses the foolish to shame the wise and the weak to shame the strong.

[27 : 21] So there's another episode in a dark story. God and yet the loving kindness, the grace of God towards his people, his undeserving people, sparkles through it all.

And remember, as we close, this story is not just their story. It may be far away from us, it may be removed from us by thousands of years, but this story is not just their story, it's our story, because just as they are sinners, I and you, we are sinners.

And just as they fell, and just as they failed, we fall, and we fail, and we make a mess of things, continually.

God does not change. And Rachel and Leah does not change. He is our God.

And he does not cut them off. And he does not cut us off. Rather, he is full of loving kindness.

[28 : 45] He is full of amazing grace. God does not do for us. He sends us his son.

He sends us the Lord Jesus to be our deliverer, our savior, our redeemer, to let us trust in him and let us worship him, the God who is fair and the God who is full of loving kindness.

Let's pray. Lord God, we thank you for who you are. We thank you for how we see who you are through these narratives, which sometimes are uncomfortable to read and difficult to understand.

And yet, as we look in these passages, we see a reflection of our own hearts and we see revelation of who you are in your nature and your character.

We thank you that you are the God who is fair, the God who is full of loving kindness. And we thank you that as we look to the cross, we see that fairness, we see that justice as Jesus stands in our place and takes the punishment for our sin.

[30 : 16] And we thank you that we see the amazing grace of God, that we are offered forgiveness, that we who should because of our sin be cut off, we are drawn close, we are called to come to the God who is full of love and patience towards us.

So help us, we pray, to come, not to stay back, not to hesitate, not to procrastinate, but to come, confessing our sin and receiving the gift of grace in your Son.

And we pray this in his name and for his sake. Amen. We'll sing to conclude the hymn that is on the screen, What Gift of Grace is Jesus my Redeemer?

singing, Amen. My steadfast love, my deep and purpose peace.

To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus. For my life is only God to live.

[31 : 59] Oh, how strange and divine I can sing. All is mine, yet no die, but through Christ in me.

I am God, but I am not forsaken. For by my side, the Savior, He will stay.

I labor on in weakness and rejoicing. For in my need, His power is displayed.

To this I hold, my shepherd will defend me. Through the deep, His body will lead.
Oh, the night has been gone, and I shall overcome. Yet not I, but through Christ in me.
[33 : 03] The age I dread, I know I am forgiven. The future's sure, the price it has been made.
For Jesus bled and suffered for my pardon. And He was raised to overthrow the grave.
To this I hold, my sin has weakly beaten. Jesus, now and ever, I am free.
All the chains are released. I can say, I am free. Yet not I, but through Christ in me.
Every breath, I long to follow Jesus. For He has said that He will bring me home.
[34 : 05] And day by day, I know He will renew me. Until I stand with joy before the throne.
To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus. All the glory evermore to Him.
When the rest is complete, still my lips shall repeat. Yet not I, but through Christ in me.
When the rest is complete, still my lips shall repeat. Yet not I, but through Christ in me.
Now in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and forevermore.
[35 : 06] Amen.