

**Genesis 29: 31- 30:24; "The Lord saw that Leah was unloved",
Sermon # 86 in the series - "Beginnings", Delivered by Pastor Paul
Rendall on October 22, 2006, in the Morning Worship Service.**

It seems rather strange that the Lord would have so many verses of Scripture devoted to this competition between the two wives of Jacob. What is the purpose of including it in the divine record? It must be that the Lord has some important lessons for all believers here. This section is not so much about Jacob as it is about the two women in his life, Leah and Rachel. They are both Jacob's wives and both would have liked to have his undivided love, but because of Laban's trickiness and his sin in giving Leah to Jacob to be his bride in the place of Rachel, Jacob was forced to become a polygamist if he wanted to have and to hold Rachel. In verse 30 it says, "Then Jacob went in to Rachel, and he loved Rachel more than Leah." You can understand, I believe, why this was so; that Leah was basically an unwanted and unloved wife. Jacob had not intended to marry her in the first place, but he felt as though he had to fulfill his "one flesh" duty to her and to provide for her needs and the children that would come from this union. But it was not the same kind of "real interest" love that Rachel had with Jacob. It is a most important matter to a woman that she knows that she is loved by her husband. In this passage we find a great competition taking place between Leah and Rachel to see who can give Jacob the most children and who can win the greater affection from him. They each hope to know and to sense Jacob's love for themselves to the exclusion of the other. The laws of God regarding polygamy had not been revealed yet, but God's intention of one man and one woman had been revealed to Adam in the garden. We do not allow polygamy in this country in any state of the Union except Utah, and that state's laws may have recently been revised to exclude it; I cannot remember, but polygamy is a terrible sin and crime against God's institution of marriage because its practice does not permit a couple to give their exclusive love to each other. If there are two wives, as in this case, then there is a competition which exists for the possession of the affection and attention of the same man. There would never be a true sense of complete possession of love, which is of the essence of marriage, and even the companionship aspects of marriage would be dramatically affected and split. We shall see that there even will be envy, jealousy, and rivalry between the children of these two unions, and because Jacob favored Joseph, that his brothers born of Leah would hate him.

The question which we will ask this morning is this, "How can a woman truly find fulfillment in a marital situation which is less than perfect?" And we will answer this question by saying that she must learn to draw the right conclusions in relation to her husband and her Lord. There are 4 observations

and 4 conclusions which every married woman should draw from our text if she would truly be fulfilled in her marriage.

1st Observation - To be truly fulfilled in marriage a woman should understand that the Lord does look with compassion on her afflictions and the prayers of her heart. (Verses 31 - 33)

It appears that Leah was a woman who knew the Lord, even though she had gone along with Laban's wicked plan for her to be given to Jacob instead of Rachel. It was only righteous with God that He would permit this in His sovereign and providential will, that Leah would not be loved by Jacob in marriage, as a consequence of her sin. One does not find true, deep, and meaningful relationships through cunning and trickery. Leah learns this all too quickly. And yet we must notice how full of compassion God is toward Leah, even though she does not deserve it. It says, "When the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, He opened her womb; but Rachel was barren." You see here what a God of Equity that our God is, that in order to secure more of Jacob's affections toward Leah, that he gives her, the one who is unloved, the ability to conceive and have children while Rachel, the one who is loved, He allows to remain barren for a time. Look at the faith of Leah this morning and make it your own. Verse 32 says, "So Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben; for she said, "The Lord has surely looked upon my affliction." "Now therefore, my husband will love me." It is true that the Lord had looked upon her affliction, and certainly Jacob would be made happy by this news, but it does not appear to be true that Jacob immediately began to love her with the same love that he had for Rachel. The Lord our God knows how to do and to accomplish all things in relation to us; in regard to helping those who trust in Him through their difficulties. He knows how to lift up those who are afflicted who are looking to Him and praying to Him. In Psalm 57: 2 it says, "I will cry out to God Most High, to God who performs all things for me." It appears that even though she had sinned that Leah knew that she should draw near to God in faith; even so, and lay all of her concerns about being loved before the King of heaven. Let me ask you if this is what you are actually doing in your marriage if you sense that you are not loved? This is the very best thing that you can do. Her past sins in regard to how she got into this marriage did not stop her.

Sensing that nothing had really changed in Jacob in his attitude toward her, she didn't stop loving him or trying to obtain his love. She didn't say, "Since Jacob does not appear to love me I will simply give up and accept things as they are in my marriage." "I won't sleep in the same tent with him any longer." "He can have my sister, and that will be the end of all of my anguish." No, she did not do this. I believe that she maintained a loving, respectful attitude toward him and didn't stop praying or hoping. This also, is the right way for all wives who feel unloved to approach difficulties in their marriage. There will, of course, be no toleration of adultery in the marriage, but this is still the right

approach; to pray, to believe that the Lord will look upon your affliction and He will give what is good. In this case, it was children. Verse 33 says, "Then she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Because the Lord has heard that I am unloved, He has therefore given me this son also." "And she called his name Simeon." The conclusion that we should draw from this first observation is this. When you feel unloved or you don't feel loved enough, learn to by faith to calm and comfort your heart in prayer to God. Learn to believe that God sees your affliction, hears your prayers, and will give you what He thinks will be best, even if your husband does not change right away. Believing prayer to Him will calm and comfort your own heart in the knowledge that He will do right by you.

The 2nd Observation - To be truly fulfilled in marriage a woman should not judge the strength of her husband's love for her on the basis of her ability to bear children. (Verses 34 and 35)

Verse 34 says that she conceived a third time and bore a son, and said, "Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." "Therefore his name was called Levi." The name means, "attached." This shows that she did have this definite goal, to win Jacob's love to her. It is indeed commendable, but I wonder if she was more consumed with obtaining the goal than she was with seeing how the Lord could bring this great thing of real love about. She was persevering in the means of child-bearing but it seems as if she is trying too hard to bring the goal about by her own efforts and observations. This is often true not only of some women in their marriages, but it is also often true of some Christians in regard to their seeing answers to their prayers. They are working hard at producing a result through using the means that they know and are convinced are from God are the right means, but they seem to be doing these things in the strength of their own flesh. If they are praying, they are trusting that their prayers will produce the result that they themselves are looking for; that the answer to those prayers will bring them the greatest personal satisfaction instead of praying and doing in relation to what would glorify and honor God the most. There is a real difference in God's mind in relation to this. He looks at the motives for everything that we are praying about, and in regard to everything that we are doing. In bearing these children, certainly Leah is doing what God would have her to do. But she wants too strongly to believe that her bearing these children should produce a real change in her husband's attitude, that he will now love her. I believe that she is wrong in this.

Turn with me to 1 Samuel 1. Here we also find a man with two wives. His name is Elkanah. In verse 2 it says that "he had two wives: the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah." "Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children." Verse 4 says, "And whenever the time came for Elkanah to make an offering, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters." But to Hannah he would give a double portion, for

he loved Hannah, although the Lord had closed her womb." "And her rival also provoked her severely, to make her miserable, because the Lord had closed her womb." So it was, year by year, when she went up to the house of the Lord, that she provoked her; therefore she wept and did not eat." "Then Elkanah her husband said to her, 'Hannah, why do you weep?' "Why do you not eat?" "And why is your heart grieved?" "Am I not better to you than ten sons?" Both Hannah and Leah are dissatisfied, but for opposite reasons. Hannah, because although her husband loved her, she could not have children; and Leah, because although she could have children, that her husband didn't love her. Both of them prayed and the Lord answered their prayers. In Hannah's case she prayed and asked the Lord to look upon her affliction and she promised the Lord that she would give the child to be the Lord's servant. In Leah's case she prayed and asked the Lord to look upon her affliction of being unloved, and the Lord gave her children, but she does not seem to be concerned about God's glory so much as she is her own being loved. The conclusion that you should come to as you think of these things as a wife who wants to know that she is loved by her husband is this; that if your husband loves you with a true and Christian love, it is because He is more interested in you as a person, than he is in what you are able to do or produce for him. The Christian love of a husband is more interested in his wife's welfare rather than obtaining his own selfish goals. "It is more blessed to give than to receive," the Lord Jesus says. But Leah did make progress in relation to her faith. Because she conceived a fourth time and bore a son, and said, "Now I will praise the Lord." "Therefore she called his name Judah. His name means, "Praise." I believe that in her naming her fourth son Judah, that she was showing how truly thankful she was for the Lord's help to her in giving her these children, even though she still did not yet feel loved. We should learn from this that we ought to be able to praise the Lord for all the help and blessing that He does give us in our marriages even if we are not attaining to the level of being loved in the way that we would want.

3rdly - To be truly fulfilled in marriage a woman should not make rash demands from her husband that only God can fulfill.

(Chapter 30, verses 1 and 2)

Now our attention turns to Rachel and her reaction to Leah's having these 4 children, and herself having none. Verse 30 says, "Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister, and said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die!" "And Jacob's anger was aroused against Rachel, and he said, 'Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" Rachel is loved but she cannot bring forth children. She is loved, but this is a test of her faith. What will Rachel, who is loved, think now that her sister is having children and she is not. Is she content with Jacob's love and happy for her sister? No, the text says that Rachel envied her sister. Envy is the thought of your heart that you want, and must have, something that someone

else has. It is something that God has given to the other person, but He has not given it to you. Envy is a sin which does great damage to the person in their perspective of things and even to their body. It says in Proverbs 14: 30 that, "A sound heart is life to the body, but envy is rottenness to the bones." It is like a disease, like a bone cancer, that eats away the marrow of your life. This envy of Rachel's was strong enough that she made a statement to Jacob which showed that she had forgotten God altogether in this matter. She says, "Give me children, or else I die!" It is a demand she makes of her husband as though she believes that he has the power to give the child to her. But Jacob is only the second cause of the creation of life within the womb. He is not the first. And so we find a righteous anger aroused within him, because he knows that her statement indicates that she has forgotten God.

Whenever envy grips the heart of a person its source is a forgetfulness of God. We forget that God is the giver of every good and perfect gift. We forget that children are the gift of the Lord. We forget that God gives and God withholds. We forget prayer, and we begin making selfish and unreasonable demands of people that we say that we love. They suddenly become the problem because we see them as more powerful than they really are. Jacob gives Rachel a righteous answer to her rash statement. "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb." This careless word of Rachel's will come back to haunt her because it would be in the labor of having her second child that she would die. Why is it that in the heat of our frustrations, in not getting what we want, that we will not guard our heart well enough to prevent the careless words from coming out? Jesus says that we shall render account in the day of judgment for every careless word, every idle word, that we shall speak. One sin will lead to another and so now she feels that she is righteous in giving her maid Bilhah to Jacob so that she will bear children to Jacob for her and then she can feel that she is just as valuable to Jacob as Leah. This will lead to Leah doing the same with her maid Zilpah. God will overrule all of these sins to bring about the twelve tribes of Israel, but still, we must observe that these selfish actions on Rachel's part do not bring glory to God. And once again, because of the unbelief that a wife has fallen into, her husband will have to participate in something that will draw his affections away from her and place them upon another who becomes a surrogate wife. What a sad thing fleshly sins such as envy and covetousness, and selfish ambition are. What is the conclusion that a wife should come to, having heard what Rachel said, and having seen what Rachel did? It is that you would learn to recognize the fact that God may have good and righteous reasons for making you wait to have children. He is wise, you can trust Him if He withholds from you something that you really want. He may give you your desire at a later time. He did so with Rachel. You do not need to envy other women who may have received gifts and abilities from God that you do not have at present and may never have. You should be

satisfied that your husband loves you. You should not make requests of your husband to give you that which only God can give. Learn that God is God and that your husband is a man who needs you to be a woman of faith.

And 4thly- To be truly fulfilled in marriage, a woman should pray that God would show her any sinful attitudes that she might have and how she can truly come to love her husband in God's way, not her own way. (Verses 3-24)

Both Rachel and Leah fell into this competition to prevail in the affections of their husband. It is right to want to have children for your husband. And it is right for a woman to give herself to her husband to prevail in his affections and to know his love. But when there is another woman who is also a wife, and she is doing the same thing, and wants the same thing, there is a real loss of what she first desired to obtain; the love of her husband. It would have been better if Rachel had retreated into the privacy of her tent and knelt down by the marriage bed and pleaded with God for the grace to be of a meek and quiet spirit in His sight and the sight of her husband. This is indeed what she eventually does. But it takes both women some years to get to this point. Rachel speaks of herself in verse 8 as wrestling with her sister with great wrestlings and prevailing. Verses 3- 13 are taken up with the one trying to outdo the other in producing children through their maids. This only shows that their competition was not without sin. What a mixture of sinful selfishness and holy desire are these sisters. Then in verses 14 - 16 we see Reuben going out into the field and finding some mandrakes. He brings them to his mother Leah. Mandrakes were thought in that day, to enhance fertility. Then Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." Leah says, "Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband?" "Would your take away my son's mandrakes also?" And Rachel says this amazing thing that reflects a change in her heart. She says, "Therefore he will lie with you tonight for your son's mandrakes. I believe that she is saying in effect, "I want to find the same source of fertility, to be able to have children, as you have Leah." She appears to want both of them to be blessed with true love from their husband. It is apparent that both of them were praying about these things, perhaps not always praying in the right way, but in verse 17 it says that "God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son." And in verse 22 it says, "Then God remembered Rachel and God listened to her and opened her womb." "And she conceived and bore a son, and said, 'God has taken away my reproach.'" "And she called his name Joseph, and said, 'The Lord shall add to me.'" So Rachel and Leah both learned to pray about having their children and they both learned to think about how they could love and be loved by their husband in the right way. When we pray about our own attitudes toward our wife or husband, or others whom we have competed with to get what we want, we will see God take away our reproach. Oh how great a lesson this is; to learn to pray and love in the way that is unselfish. It takes the

grace of Christ to see these fleshly attitudes of demanding and competing with others, to be put out of our life. But by faith in Christ the old things pass away and all things become new, and we bear fruit unto God. Christ is the husband of His bride the church and He has betrothed us to Himself with the dying love that he demonstrated at the cross. We need not compete or fight over His love. Those who believe in Him will know of His love toward them in a way as though they have Him all to themselves. In Song of Solomon, three times it is mentioned, "I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine." We need to be more and more caught up in His love as it says, in Song of Solomon 7: 10, "I am my beloved's, and His desire is toward me." "Come my Beloved, let us go forth to the field; let us lodge in the villages." "Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine has budded, whether the grape blossoms are open, and the pomegranates are in bloom." "There I will give you my love." "The mandrakes give off a fragrance, and at our gates are pleasant fruits, all manner, new and old, which I have laid up for you, my beloved."