



The Sermon

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Genesis 29:31-30:24

"Faithfulness Multiplied"

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TRANSCRIPT

Can you open your Bibles, please, to Genesis chapter 29, Genesis chapter 29. Happy Father's Day to the fathers. I think Mark has a plan, and he flies me out here whenever odd things happen in Genesis. So today we've got mandrakes; and I think that's primarily why Mark thought it would be a good idea to get somebody all the way from Ireland, because if it goes horribly wrong, well, I can go and hide and it's all OK. It is a strange passage that we come to this morning, and it's a bit strange too because it's Father's Day. There's a few people who are quick.

It's Father's Day, and there's a lot of kids being born. But the focus is really on the ladies in this text. And so we're going to get to know the ladies, but we're going to, even more, get to know God, who works in messy families to establish His purposes. He said all along He's going to not just look after one particular line all the way to Jesus, but He was going to establish a nation; and this is really the passage where that nation begins to get formed and established. We go from focusing on one individual in each generation, to all of a sudden we have twelve individuals that will form the tribes of Israel. Now if you have your Bibles open, let me read from verse 31 of Genesis 29. Genesis 29:31.

"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.

"When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister. She said to Jacob, 'Give me children, or I shall die!' Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel, and he said, 'Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?' Then she said, 'Here's my servant Bilhah; go in to her, so that she may give birth on my behalf, that even I may have children through her.' So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife, and Jacob went in to her. And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. Then Rachel said, 'God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son.' Therefore she called his name Dan. Rachel's servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. Then Rachel said, 'With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister and have prevailed.' So she called his name Naphtali.

"When Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children, she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. Then Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. And Leah said, 'Good fortune has come!' so she called his name Gad. Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. And Leah said, 'Happy am I! For women have called me happy.' So she called his name Asher.

"In the days of wheat harvest Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, 'Please give me some of your son's mandrakes.' But she said to her, 'Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son's mandrakes also?' Rachel said, 'Then he may lie with you tonight in exchange for your son's mandrakes.' When Jacob came 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.' So he lay with her that night. And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. Leah said, 'God has given me my wages because I gave my servant to my husband.' So she called his name Issachar.

"And Leah conceived again, and she bore Jacob a sixth son. Then Leah said, 'God has endowed me with a good endowment; now my husband will honor

me, because I have borne him six sons.' So she called his name Zebulun. Afterward she bore a daughter and called her name Dinah.

"Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son and said, 'God has taken away my reproach.' And she called his name Joseph, saying, 'May the LORD add to me another son!'" Let me pray.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we come so often in great need, and this morning is no different. We have read Your Word, Lord, but we need Your help to understand. And we pray that You would help us to see You, the sovereign Lord, who we have already been singing about, who works in this world, but also works in the messy lives of Your people. We pray that You would educate us, that You would help us to understand You more. And we pray that You would give us comfort and encouragement in seeing the way that You engage in sinful people's lives.

We pray especially this morning, Lord, for those maybe in the congregation who have themselves battled the difficulties that come with aspirations in regards to our family life – childlessness and miscarriages and just deep concern, Lord. We pray that You would allow them especially with an acute ear to hear You and to hear the comfort that is provided in Scripture for them. And we pray again for those who as yet don't know You. We pray that You would protect them from getting lost in what is a strange narrative. And we pray, Lord, that You would help them to see so clearly the goodness and the greatness of Jesus Christ, that they would call upon Him and be saved. So Lord, we come in great need, asking for real help, and knowing that Your Spirit works through this particular means in a special way. We pray for Your blessing, in Jesus' name. Amen. [End]

Well, Hebrews 10:23 says, "For He who promised is faithful, is faithful." And this passage, though we can get so caught up in all of the odd details and the terrible behavior of so many of the human elements in this story, this story is really one about God, who is faithful. If you are trusting in Jesus Christ this morning, we have a faithful God, who insists that He remains with His people, who insists on giving hope and help to His people, who is actively engaged in our lives. He's a wonderful God; and especially He is fearful to keep every, every promise that He has made in Scripture to us. He is faithful to keep His promises; and often He does that in an extravagant way, in a way that's beyond our expectations.

And so this morning, in particular, as we look at all of these strange births and strange behaviors, I want you to look beyond the human characters and to see something of the faithful God who drives a narrative. And so the first thing I want us to recognize this morning in Genesis 29 and 30 is, "God's faithfulness is not based in geography. God's fearfulness is not based on geography."

I don't know what you guys were thinking, you know; maybe because I'm from cold Ireland you all left your heaters on this last week. It's a different world here in Dallas, this week especially, compared to cold Ireland. But we have a God who, whether it be Ireland, whether it be Dallas, who is faithful. His faithfulness is not based on geography; and we see that bubbling below the surface of this narrative.

Remember what's been going on here. Before all these births take place, Jacob had to run away from home, and in chapter 28 he's leaving the land, the Promised Land, the land attached to all of these aspirations and promises about what God would do for this particular family. He's leaving the land of Abraham and Isaac.

Leaving that land was no small thing. Do you remember Abraham, when it came to finding a wife for his son Isaac, he refused to leave. He sent his servant to go and get the wife, because he was to stay in the Promised Land. In fact, Isaac his son, all the way through Isaac's life, he never, never leaves the land, because it's the Promised Land.

And so in chapter 28, Jacob is doing something staggering. He's about to step out of the Promised Land. He's about to leave the place associated with this God. Remember who he had worked so hard and fought in such an awful way, but fought to gain blessing from. And now, because he tried to grab ahold of that blessing in a distorted way, now he has to leave that very land. It's a big deal. It's a it's a significant thing.

In the ancient world they associated their gods with geography. So you had the God of Israel, the gods of Egypt, the gods of the Babylonians. And though we know our God is the God over all the heavens and the earth, still in the mindset of the people, they squashed God down to a piece of land, to

a piece of geography. The gods were associated with particular places. But Yahweh is the God over all the heavens and all the earth.

And so Jacob is about to step over the border into a different land, and he's wondering, "Will God be with me? Will I leave God behind?" And it's in that spirit that he falls asleep on his rock, and God gives him that amazing dream in chapter 28, and God spells out to him specifically that where he will go, God will continue to be with him. God will be faithful to keep him. God will satisfy every promise that He has made to him.

Look back to chapter 28 and verse 15 in particular. This is a key revelation, chapter 28, verse 15. God speaks in a dream and He says, "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I promised you." Those are game-changing words. These are words that change the whole story. This allows Jacob to step over that border with confidence, because God has promised to go with him; and that reality makes all the difference.

Last week Dr. Lawson spoke and he made clear some of the elements of difference that immediately burst forth in the beginning of chapter 29, the unfolding providence. He just happens to arrive at the right well, at the right time, and meet the right girl. God's at work. He has this unbelievable bout of strength. And God continues to be at work in the blessing that then is experienced.

These twelve children that will bubble up in this story are no accident. They're part of the work of a faithful God to keep the promises He has made. He's doing what He said He would do: giving descendants, establishing a nation. When you put chapters 29 and 30 together and you pull back and look at what's happening across it, that's what we see. God is faithful to go, to go with Jacob. God has shown Himself to do what He said. Wherever Jacob goes, God will go and remain faithful.

Right now, when it comes to studying, especially narrative in the Old Testament, you've got to be very careful you don't misappropriate the promises of God. In other words, you can't read something that God promises to Jacob and say, "Well, He promised that to me," because that's not always the case. But this is one of those promises that there is something to learn from here, because God has very clearly in later

revelation told us if we are trusting in Jesus Christ that He will also be with us, and will remain faithful to us. Multiple, not just one time, multiple times through Scripture, God promised us, "Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you."

Do you remember at the close of Jesus' ministry, He says in Matthew 28:20, "Surely I am with you always, even to the end of the age." As He was with Jacob, He has promised, Christian, to be with you today, wherever you are, wherever you go, whether it be Israel the Promised Land or Paddan-aram. Whether it be our brothers and sisters in the Ukraine this morning, He is with them. Even here in Dallas, He is with us. And that reality makes all the difference in the world. God remains faithful to His promises wherever His people happen to live. God's faithfulness is not based on geography.

Now the second thing I want us to say this morning is, "God's faithfulness is not based on morality either. It's not based on morality." Now this at first sounds confusing, because God does bless our obedience. But also, God still works through our disobedience; that's the point. You can't read Genesis 29 and 30 and take it as a pattern for moral living; it's a mess, it's an obvious mess.

Jacob's family is a messy family, and the sinful actions that take place are going to have repercussions. We're going to read in a moment about Rachel's envy in verse 1. It's not a surprise, is it, that later Leah's boys will have envy of Joseph in chapter 37. That word will be used deliberately again. It's going to have real repercussions. And yet, faithful God is faithful, and He's still keeping His promises.

Last week when you studied the beginning of chapter 29, the saddest character I think in that whole narrative is Leah. Have you paused and thought about Leah? Her plight, her lot and life is a miserable one. The text stresses that her husband loved her sister more. That's awful.

But notice how the end of the chapter stresses that though Jacob maybe missed Leah, God didn't. Look at verse 31 of chapter 29. It starts, "When the LORD saw that Leah was hated." Do you see that? "When the LORD saw." He knew the painful circumstances that Leah was wallowing in and living in; and God moves at the end of 29 to deliberately bless the unloved one, even over the one who was loved deeply.

It reminds us of an aspect of our God's character. Have you notice all the way through Scripture, and indeed through world history, God is a God who often takes interest and the very people everybody else neglects and mistreats and tramples over. Yet, especially Genesis, whether it be a Hagar or whether it be a Leah, Genesis stresses that God takes notice of these individuals. He cares for them. And Leah names her children accordingly: verse 32, "Reuben," because Yahweh saw her; verse 33, "Simeon," because Yahweh heard her; verse 34, "Levi," because she believed God was going to give her a better marriage. God was at work. And the sad reality is her situation didn't change dramatically, it continued to be very hard.

And yet, notice the difference that comes in the naming of the fourth son. All the first three are kind of aspirational. But look at verse 35 in the naming of this fourth son: "And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, 'This time I will praise the LORD.' Therefore she called his name Judah." The first three sons, their names reflect her circumstances of neglect. But now this fourth name, it's simply, "Praise God. Praise Yahweh. Praise be to Him."

I think the idea here is that none of the pregnancies ever secured her husband's love, but what they did do was they demonstrated to her in a very difficult home life that God loved her, that that God had noticed her, that God saw her, God heard her, that God was active in her life; and that brought tremendous comfort to Leah. Her sense of God's engagement with her superseded the lack of her husband's engagement.

But there's more here, isn't there? When you pull back to the big picture of Scripture, because who is Judah? Do you remember? Well, if you go to those genealogies in Matthew or Luke and you trace the line. it's not one of the other eleven, it's Judah whose name will be mentioned. He's the one through whom the serpent crusher Jesus Christ ultimately will come into the world.

In other words God brings - think about this - God brings Jesus through this particular line, one that's marked by neglect and rejection, second-class wife-hood and tremendous heartache. Why? Well, in part because though maybe Jacob didn't love Leah, God so loved the world, and Leah too, and He works to bring this great redemption plan through the very channel of neglect. That says something about our Lord. And as Leah rightly said,

"That's a reason to praise Yahweh," to praise our Lord. For God is faithful; and even out of sin, even out of this mess, God continues to unfold His promises and to bring about redemption. God is faithful to work out His glorious purpose in and through sinful lives, even when it's messy.

I don't know everybody in this room, but maybe some of you this morning, you're here and you've been thinking about the Christian message, the gospel, the good news; and yet you're scratching your head, and you're kind of a bit nervous about who might talk to you afterwards, because you don't really know if you fit in. You think about the life that you've lived to this point, and you're so conscious of the mess, the sin, the real sin, the brokenness that it's left behind and awake, and you feel unqualified to fully engage in what is going on here, this great movement of God. Think of Leah and Judah, and the nature of our God who delights to reach into the mess and to redeem and to restore.

When I was a young teenager, a junior higher, you know, that kind of awkward, pimply stage, where you kind of – you don't know if your voice is here or here, that kind of stage. There's a pastor who came and spoke at a kind of outreach meeting that I was at, and the talk stayed with me. Very few talks really cement themselves in the head, especially when you're at that awkward stage. But this one did.

He took this massive ball, you could see through it, and he pulled out all of the gunk that he had gone down to our local Ralph's equivalent, or store, and threw into it all of the kind of yellow label items, all of the things that have been reduced because they were already out of date. And so he threw in some like creamed rice, and he threw in some custard, and then he really got nasty and he threw in some dog food and some anchovies and, you know, scrunched up some tuna and splashed that in there too. And the thing smelled revolting, and it looked revolting.

And then in the middle of it now – and this is where you have to use your imagination. In Ireland we have, you know, not dollar bills, we have coins for the equivalent. And he threw in that dollar coin, and he asked the room of awkward junior higher, "Who wants to come up and grab the coin, it's yours for free, if you could reach in and grab it." And we all went, "Ew," you know, you can imagine. But there's always one like awkward, particularly nasty junior high boy who gets glee in these types of challenges. And he came forward, and he reached his hand into the ball and pulled out the coin

and, of course, quickly went, washed his hand, washed the coin, and held up his prize in boastful exclamation.

And the point was very clear, wasn't it? This is salvation. God knows full well what this world is; and indeed, He knows full well what your heart is like, and how gross and messy it actually is. And yet the good news of Scripture's message is, "God is a God who reaches into the darkness to pluck out that which He deems valuable." He redeems; that's our God.

And so this morning if you're here and you feel unqualified, know if you turn to the Lord, if you put your trust in Christ, He is the Redeemer, not you. He is the one who brings transformation. He is the one who reaches down and restores and cleans and redeems. Oh, we have a wonderful God, whose faithfulness is not based on geography, and His faithfulness is not based on some aspirational morality that we pull ourselves up to. No, He reaches in.

The third thing I want you to see this morning is, "God's fearfulness is not based on our memory. God's faithfulness is not based on our memory." We'll spend a little bit longer on this one. We have a God who is faithful wherever we go. We have a God who is faithful no matter how broken the circumstances are that we find ourselves in; He still keeps His promises. But also, we have a God who is fearful to remember His people, even when for maybe a time they have forgotten Him.

Chapter 30 turns the attention primarily to that other wife, to Leah's sister Rachel. And her story is another painful story, not a public pain like Leah's, but a very private pain, one indeed that many have wrestled with in the past: the pain of childlessness.

I think sometimes in church we ourselves can have our own things we're working out and wrestling with in our minds, and we leave here thinking that everybody else in this building, you know, it seems for them they just pray and everything works out really smoothly and easily. But for me, I pray all the time, and it never happens.

Well, Rachel is one of those people in Scripture that I think gives us a wonderful caution this morning. And as a side note, let me highlight that

caution. Some of you need to know this morning that Christians do often wrestle with childlessness. Many in this fellowship have experienced miscarriage. A number in the church here have battled postnatal depression. Most have had moments of real trouble in their marriages where they needed help and support to work through those things. On Father's Day, all husbands have said the wrong thing at the wrong time. I say that very simply so that you know as we talk about Rachel this morning, if there are private circumstances that you have been wrestling with that are brought to the front of your mind, I want you to know there is wonderful resource here in the church family. There is support to be found here in Trinity Bible Church.

I think one of the greatest concerns I have as a pastor is especially when it comes to these issues – I don't mean it in a contrived way – but that are more related to the females. I see my congregation struggling with them, and I wish the ladies talked to each other more so that they could find support and help from each other in these particular issues. Often these personal, private difficulties are the very things that can strain us the most; and when these particular types of difficulties come, you either respond by looking to God for help, or like Rachel, you respond in a way that breeds greater pain and greater damage.

So I want us to take a few moments to think about what Rachel does wrong here. So first of all, let's think a little bit about the problem that she actually faced, and very simply I want you to notice, first of all, "It was a natural problem." Look at verse 1: "When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children," this is a very natural problem. Infertility affects one in seven couples. It's not unusual, it's not on common, it's a reality. You think of the number of people, the number of couples represented in this room, it's a common problem, one in seven couples. Yet these natural difficulties very often in our own mind we make, or we make them feel anyway, unnatural, and we don't talk about it.

And you see that with Rachel, because this particular issue, this issue of childlessness, of infertility, it wasn't just a natural one to her, it was a family problem as well. You see the language there in chapter 29 at the end of verse 31: "But Rachel was barren." Well, if you turn back to Genesis chapter 11, Genesis 11:30, speaking of Jacob's grandmother, we read Genesis 11:30, "Now Sarai was barren; she had no child." And turn over to Genesis chapter 25. Genesis 25:21, we read, "And Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren."

So in this particular family, the grandmother and the mother, and now the daughter-in-law, they all have and have experienced the very same thing. Now the text doesn't tell us why it was left in this kind of non-spoken, unnatural dilemma kind of bubbling in the background; maybe it was because Jacob never talked at home, and like most men, he just shrugged and kind of kept walking. Or maybe it's because, like today, we have certain things that we stigmatize, certain struggles that we just tend to bottle up and put a cloak over, and that stops us from talking. Whatever it was Rachel here had something that was causing her real trouble, something that was causing her real anxiety; but it wasn't unique to Rachel.

She saw her four nephews running around Leah, and instead of being able to engage with them, and to find joy and happiness and being involved in their lives, she allowed herself to grow isolated, and resentment to grow instead. And yet it was a natural issue, it was common in her family. Why do I stress that? Because that's the way sin often gets a hold: it takes natural problems, common problems that are real and are painful, and it uses them, it leverages them to get a foothold in our life. Here, Rachel feels incredibly alone, and that created a fertile ground for the broken responses that followed.

Now before we talk about those, I want you to see not only was it a natural problem and a family problem, we would be misusing the text if we didn't highlight it was also a divine problem, a divine problem. 29:31 stresses that God grants children. It was He, as we said, who gave Leah the four. In fact, Jacob's harsh words in chapter 30:2, though they weren't helpful and weren't the right things to be spoken in that moment, they were nevertheless true. It is God who gives children. Children are a gift from the Lord.

Now that opens up a whole set of complex questions that we can't answer this morning. For example, why did God not grant Rachel children at this point? Why did she have to wait? Maybe, maybe it was to grow her. Maybe it was to make her more dependent on Him. Maybe it was just out of a care for Leah, to encourage her.

Rachel's words there in verse 1, "Give me children, or I die," they're poignant, because ultimately on her second child in chapter 35 she will die giving birth. Maybe. maybe God knew that there was a frailty there, and actually in not giving her children for a time, He was preserving her life. It

was out of care. Ultimately, we don't know, we don't know. We can speculate, but we don't know.

And that's the point. Often in these personal trials and difficulties that we do face, we don't know why. We don't know why. And yet, God's word insists He's still in control. We don't know why, but He is in control. We don't know why, but He has plans and purposes in this difficult circumstance. We don't know why, but we know He loves us. We don't know why, but we know He calls us even in this difficult circumstance to trust Him.

Trust in God when in His providence He withholds good things from us and we don't know why. That's hard. That's really difficult. I think personally, it's easier sometimes to trust God with the big things. It's easier as a Christian, certainly here, to believe that God is in control of that whole messy situation in the Ukraine, that God will do good, that God will work over there. But it's hard to trust Him in our personal lives. It's hard to trust Him when as a couple you have just experienced a miscarriage, and to believe that He knows what He's doing as we move forward. It's hard to trust God when the providences are dark, when He withholds for a time from us the very thing that He says in His word is good, and we still don't know why. That is hard!

And in what follows, Rachel shows us that in that moment where it is hard, Satan is at work, and he can capitalize on the difficulty of that moment of the hardness. So the problem she faced, it was natural, it was a family problem, and it was a divine problem. God was in control, even off the dark providence. But look at her broken response.

Again, the Bible is wonderfully honest, isn't it? Certainly, Genesis has been painting a picture of these, you know, people, God's people, warts and all. We see every foible in them that mark their life. And that helps to be a warning to us, because here Rachel lets wrong emotion grow.

Look at verse 1 of chapter 30: "When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister, she envied her sister." Envy's that kind of jealous obsession and craving for what other people have; and rather than finding joy and her nephews is she grew bitter, and envied.

Just before I left there was a couple in the church, and they've had three miscarriages. But the lady's pregnant again; and actually, she's very close to this child coming. And I'm so delighted, because they shared with me each time the previous children have been lost. And this one is coming; and they've longed and prayed for this moment for a long time. But they have another family member who's also experienced a lot of miscarriages. And they used to be so close because they had a trial that they shared, and now they don't talk, because the lady who isn't yet pregnant can't cope with the fact that this girl has been helped and blessed by the Lord.

That's exactly what's going on here, an envy that grew out of a painful circumstance, but that then starts to hurt. She let these wrong emotions grow. And actually, when it did grow, it lashes out at the relationships around her. You see that in verse 1. Not only does she attack Leah and the nephews, but she says to Jacob, the one she did care about, "Give me children, or I die!" She blames him for the infertility. In desperation she blames him for something that's completely outside his control.

Again, this is real hurt, real difficulty; but those real things open a door for sinful emotion that then bursts out and lashes out against the very relationships we are meant to care most about. In fact, for her, it's the closest in her family that she kicks out. Again, she let wrong emotions grow, she attacked the relationship she valued, and then she looked at other means to satisfy her longing. Interestingly, the text really stresses that Rachel is at work here, she's the one driving chapter 30. She's trying to change her circumstances, and the method she employs is that of surrogate pregnancy. Now in that world, in that ancient world that wasn't an unusual thing. But it's strange that it's employed by this family, because this family had got hurt by surrogate pregnancy before. Do you remember Genesis chapter 16, Hagar and Ishmael and the mess that fostered? They should have known better.

Adoption in and of itself can be an absolutely beautiful thing, can't it, a truly wonderful thing. But look at verse 8, when the first surrogate child is born: "Then Rachel said, 'I'm so happy.'" Nope. "Then Rachel said, 'God has blessed.'" Nope. "Then Rachel said, 'A little boy that I can care for.'" Nope. "Then Rachel said, 'With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister and have prevailed.'"

What's that got to do with a baby? Do you see how her mind got so warped by sin over time. She'd longed for a child at the beginning, and now it was only about being her sister, getting one up on Leah; and she tried to control the whole circumstance in her own strength. And then look at what happens next; she continues to look to human solutions to fix her longing: "What can I do next?" She's still not satisfied. "What can I do?" And that's where the mandrakes come in.

There was a belief in that world that mandrakes encouraged fertility, you know, mandrake soup at bedtime, and the children will come. That was the idea in that world. And so when Reuben, Leah's boy, comes home with mandrakes, Rachel's eyes go wide. She wants, she needs those mandrakes. She can't live without them, she needs them at all costs.

Now at this point in the story it seems very clearly that she had taken up chief role in the house, and she had stopped all the others from getting to share a bed with Jacob, probably to stop him having more children; she was tired of seeing everybody else pregnant. But now with a Esau-like impulsiveness – remember that man who sold his birthright for some stew – she sells the marital bed for some mandrakes. Now the point is not – don't misunderstand this – it's not that there's a big problem with fertility treatment, that's not the point. The big point in chapter 30 is what's missing. She's done a lot of things, hasn't she. But what has she not done? She's never sought the Lord in this.

In fact, do you remember the Old Testament name for God that's associated with faithfulness? The capital L-O-R-D, Yahweh. When that appears in your Bible, you're to think not just of a name, but that name that speaks of His promise-keeping nature. Leah uses that name a lot, Rachel doesn't until verse 24. And all of these schemes God's really out of the picture; never is He mentioned. Every technique employed is driven by Rachel seeking to control the outcome; and it's driven as well by envy. And where did all that get her? Well, she goes through all the mandrakes and gives up her bed and does all these other things, and it ends up with Leah not just having four kids, she has seven.

In the ancient world that's so often associated with a number of perfection. Now believe me, three maybe three, that's the number of perfection, no more; three is plenty. But in that world, seven; and Leah has the – it's the gentleman's family, the perfect family. She has it, until her tent is all noisy, birthdays all the time. And then there's these two other ladies, and each of

them have two, just putting salt in the wound. All of her scheming; and all it's done is intensified Rachel's sense that she can't.

Her sinful response had made what was a difficult situation even worse. And my point is this: how you respond to life's difficulties matters. They will come, these trials and difficulties, and how you respond matters. You can take what is a hard situation and make it toxic and hurtful to everybody else and to yourself at the same time. Her negative response only increases the damage, the problems she faced, her broken response.

But notice, as we come to the end, "The source of her redemption. The source of her redemption." Nothing she tried in her own strength worked, and she tried a lot. But there was One who was bigger than this circumstance. Look at verse 22: "Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son and said, 'God has taken away my reproach.'" You see? You see the cause spelled out again and again: "God remembered"? That's the same language we find in chapter 8, verse 1: "God remembered Noah." Now God remembered miserable, hurting, envious Rachel. He remembered her, and He listened to her.

And verse 23, "God has taken away." Again, look back to verse 8. Rachel said, "With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister and have prevailed." But now, now in verse 23, there's no "I." "God has taken away my reproach." You see the difference? She's come to realize that not Rachel, but God is able. God prevails over difficulties. And then even more gloriously, in verse 24, she uses that covenant name for the first time, "And she called his name Joseph, saying, 'May the' - there it is, capital L-O-R-D - "may the LORD add to me another son!'" She starts looking ahead, trusting the promise-keeping nature of God, rather than herself.

God did notice Rachel; and in time, we've just seen, He did answer and He did bless. But through this process, as He is doing with Jacob, He stressed to her that it's through Him, it's not through her; she can't control these circumstances. It's through Him and Him alone the blessing comes. God is in control, but often He brings us through trials and difficulties to foster a greater dependence in His people on Him.

Often when difficulties come in life, you will have to respond. And I want to caution you. Don't be a Rachel. Don't let those wrong emotions grow, keep check of them. Don't attack the other relationships God has given to you in life. Don't look selfishly to other means alone to satisfy that longing. Don't look just a human solutions to fix your problems. If that's all there is and we leave God out of the picture, it will always end in hurt and bitterness.

But Christian, there is One there, remember, faithful wherever we go. "God is our refuge and strength and very present help in trouble." He's able. He's sufficient. He sustains His people. He guides them through the valley. God is the one you need this morning. That doesn't make life easy, but He's promised to come alongside beside you in the difficulty. He's promised to care for you as a child. And remember, He's faithful, He keeps every promise He's made.

Sometimes as Christians the idea of providence is such a cold thing in our mind, that God is in control. But it's a wonderful thing; let me show you why. Turn to John 11, just as we close, John 11. John 11:49. Do you remember Rachel in chapter 30, verse 1? She said, "Give me children, or I die! Give me children, Jacob, or I die!"

Well, let me show you the words of our sovereign Lord, John 11:49. In this particular context Jesus has raised Lazarus from the dead, and all of the notorious religious leaders have met together and are plotting what they are going to do to Jesus, they're jealous. And in verse 49 we read, "But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.' He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied," - in other words, this is true - "that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad."

"Give me children, or I die!" And God says about Jesus, "He will die to bring into one His children." This is why providence is a wonderful thing, because the One who is in control of every circumstance of our life is One who is willing to die to make us His children. He loves us to such an extent, it has been sealed with blood.

Now life will be hard. When you leave this building this morning, you will go out, and the world will be difficult. The painful circumstances in your family you've been wrestling with, they won't just disappear and go away, they will be there. But we have One who will care for us through it all, One who insists on what is best. Though for a time and season this may be painful, He will insist on what is best, because, because He loves us deeply.

"Give me children, or I die!" No. The Lord, who is in control, who cares for you this morning, Jesus died that you may be His child, that you may be part of this glorious family. What a wonderful thing to know He is in control. Let me pray.

[Prayer] Heavenly Father, we are so thankful that You know all things, and You know every difficulty we experience in life, every hardship, every even quiet and personal trial that we wrestle with. But Lord, we are so thankful that You are faithful and do not leave us wallowing; but Lord, You go with us, You persist. You're bigger than these circumstances. And Lord, You keep every promise You've made. We are so thankful that the One who is in control is one who has demonstrated love to us in the most incredible of ways.

So help us, Lord, as we walk out of this building into the week ahead. Equip us for the work that You have given for us to do, and help us in every situation we find ourselves in to praise You and to find hope and encouragement to step forward, knowing that we have one who loves us dearly and is in control of the very difficult circumstance that we find ourselves in. Give us help to honor You and to trust You even this day. For it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.