

Dysfunction in the Chosen Family

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[0 : 00] And I would like you to grab a copy of the Scriptures, whether you have your own Bible with you this morning, Or you have one that is sitting around in a chair that we've provided for you.

Grab a copy of the Scriptures. If you're using one of those Bibles that we've provided for you, then just turn to page 24. We're still pretty close to the beginning of the Bible, still walking through the lives of the patriarchs in the book of Genesis.

So you just have to turn to page 24. Otherwise, in your own copy of the Scriptures, open up to the end of Genesis chapter 29. We did not quite finish chapter 29 last week as we continued our journey through the life of Jacob.

So we're going to pick up this morning in verse 31 of chapter 29. And we're going to move down through half of chapter 30, down through verse 24.

And so I would like you, as you stand to your feet, to direct your eyes to verse 31 of chapter 29, where we will begin to read this morning. Moses writes, When the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb.

[1 : 19] But Rachel was buried. 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 into her 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.

[2 : 25] And Jacob went into 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?

[3 : 24] 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 born him six sons.

So she called his name Zebulun. Afterwards 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. Father, as we approach this passage of scripture, I pray that you would help us to see it not merely as a story of events that occurred a long time ago, but as much more than that, as your very word to us.

[4 : 36] Though the details of these events may strike us as odd, though we may be sometimes confused by the actions of those in this passage of scripture, we ask that you would reveal to us how you are at work through these events, and show us and direct us and correct us.

As we examine our own lives in the light of your work through these people. We ask these things in Christ's name. Amen. Excuse me.

This is a passage of scripture that I don't think that most preachers would look forward to, would be anticipating, hotly anticipating the opportunity to preach through the details of Jacob's family, and how his family came to be, how his children came to be.

And yet nevertheless, we are convinced because the scriptures tell us that all scripture is breathed out by God, and in fact is profitable for us, is good for us.

And so these historical details, these strange historical details in the lives of this particular family, are good for us to hear, and good for us to learn, because through them and in them, God is teaching us something.

[6 : 03] Teaching us something about his own ways, and teaching us how we are to respond to him, respond to his promises, respond to what he reveals to us of his plans.

This is, of course, the story of an incredibly dysfunctional family. I think that's probably an understatement. To say that Jacob's family was a dysfunctional family is a great understatement. Of course, lying at the, sort of at the base of the dysfunction of Jacob's family is something that we have already seen before. We have already seen in the book of Genesis, we have seen polygamy rear its head.

We have seen when men accumulate in the biblical stories, when they accumulate multiple wives, when they deviate from the pattern that God set forth in Genesis chapter 2, of a man being united to a woman, and those two being one flesh, any deviation from that comes with consequences.

It comes with great repercussions. And so we saw that in the life of Abraham. When Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham, strife was created out of that, and there was great difficulty and dysfunction in Abraham's family.

[7 : 15] We see it now, especially though, highlighted in the life of Jacob, where you have not two women who have been covenantally united to Jacob, but four women, and it creates a situation where it becomes glaringly obvious that any deviation from God's divine standards comes with a great price to pay.

We've talked about this before as we've considered this issue from other passages in Genesis. And one of the observations that we made beforehand, before, was that Jesus Himself looks back toward some of the deviations from God's design for marriage.

He looks back upon those when He's asked about the issue of divorce by the Pharisees, and He says that Moses, that is the law of God that came through Moses, Moses permitted you to divorce because of the hardness of your own hearts.

And we observe that that's also true in relation to the issue of polygamy. As we read through the Old Testament, and we see these great heroes of the faith, yet we find that they had multiple wives, sometimes we scratch our heads and we think, what's going on here?

And the answer to that is that they did move away from the way that God originally intended marriage to be. And God permitted that for a time because of the hardness and the sinfulness of the hearts of even His own people.

[8 : 37] But it did not come without consequences. Whether you're looking at the life of David and his children by various women, it came with consequences. Or the life of his son Solomon and the idolatry that was brought in by his accumulation of many foreign wives.

We see over and over that any movement away from God's standards set forth in Genesis chapter 2 comes with great consequences. And Jacob's movement away from that standard, even though it was not his original intention, his movement away from that standard comes with great consequences.

His family is an incredibly dysfunctional family. And yet in the midst of the dysfunction that we are reading about here in these verses, we see God continuing to fulfill His promises.

In reality, this chapter, chapter 30, and the account of the births of Jacob's children is really a continuation of the theme that we looked at last week.

That God is providentially pursuing Jacob. That God is sovereignly ensuring that His promises come to fulfillment in the life of Jacob and in the lives of those descended from Jacob.

[9 : 52] And that's happening not in spite of the sins of Jacob and others around him, but God is actually accomplishing His plans through the sinful behaviors and actions of Jacob, of Laban, of Jacob's wives, and of others who surround Jacob and impact his life.

God's plan, God's sovereign plan within the life of Jacob is not knocked off of course because Laban tricks Jacob. His sovereign plan is not knocked off of course because of the actions of Jacob's wives or even because Jacob accumulated multiple wives.

God is able to accomplish His plans. He is able to fulfill His promises in and through the sinful behavior of human beings.

Now that comes with a lot of mystery. We have to be willing to accept mystery as we work our way through the Scriptures. There will be things that we cannot fully wrap our minds around.

And this is perhaps one of them. How God can sovereignly plan for events to unfold and yet those events unfold through the sinful actions of people and He holds those people accountable for their sins.

[11 : 06] It is a mystery and yet it is a truth that is upheld in the Scriptures. And we see God's hand at work throughout the births of all of these children.

We see come into existence the fathers of 11 of the 12 tribes of Israel in this passage.

God is at work. We see the descendants of Jesus Himself. Jesus, the Lion from the tribe of Judah.

We see Judah being born here.

We see Levi, the father of the Levitical priesthood, that set a pattern that showed us what it is to have sacrificed so that we could better understand the sacrifice of Christ when He came and gave His own life as a ransom for His people.

We see Levi born in this passage. We see instrumental figures who factor heavily throughout the rest of the biblical story come into the world in this passage.

[12 : 10] And that's not accidental. God is at work through the sinful actions of people to accomplish His sovereign plans.

But saying that does not mean that we cannot take a step back and look at the details of the actions of these people and then ask ourselves, how should we live in light of the mistakes that they themselves made?

In other words, so we can see God's hand at work in this passage. We can see His hand at work in Genesis chapter 30. We know He's moving. We know He's working. We know He's accomplishing His will.

But we can also look at the sinful actions of these individuals and we can see in that a pattern laid out that the rest of the Scriptures would say to us, stay away from that path.

Don't walk the way that they walked. Don't go in that direction. And so this morning, we're going to zero in on Leah and Rachel.

[13 : 16] Try to understand what they're doing and why they're doing the things that they're doing so that you and I, even as we celebrate the fact that God can and does work even through our sins, we can look and ask ourselves, but how can we avoid the missteps that they make?

How can we avoid taking these paths that they take that lead them to such anger and bitterness and frustration? So as we jump in, we jump back in with Leah in verse 31 and we're reminded of her situation.

We're told that when the Lord saw that Leah was hated, He opened her womb. We are reminded of the fact that Jacob never wanted to marry Leah in the first place.

She wasn't his chosen bride. He didn't want her. She's not wanted. That's what the text means when it says that she was hated. Jacob didn't want her. He just had to deal with her because he

was tricked by her father Laban, now his father-in-law.

And God has compassion upon Leah because of that. God looks upon her situation and He has pity for her and we're told that He opens her womb. We are reminded once again that God is sovereign over these things.

[14 : 25] God is the one who opens the womb. God is the one who closes the womb. God is the one who decides. God is the one who opens the womb. Issues of life and death. He is sovereign over all of these things.

And yet, He is moved by compassion for Leah to open her womb to fulfill His sovereign plan through her. And then we are reminded that Rachel though was barren.

And then we walk through the conception of four different sons by Leah. Leah. First, Reuben. We're told in verse 32, Leah conceived and bore 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's name literally means look, a son. So she's overjoyed.

She's excited that she has a son because she believes that the birth of a son through her will cause Jacob to change his mind about her. Now he will love her.

[15 : 24] Throughout this entire passage, Leah is desperate in a sense to gain the affection of Jacob that belongs to her sister Rachel.

Everything that she does is motivated by this desire to have his affection. And so there we're already seeing the consequences of this deviation from the biblical pattern of one man married to one woman.

The consequences of that here are that you have an unloved, unwanted woman who spends her days desperately trying to gain something that she seems unable, no matter what she does, no matter how the Lord blesses her in childbearing, she seems unable to gain the affection that she so longs to have.

And that continues as she bears other children. First Reuben, and as you move down through the passage, there is Simeon, and then Levi, and then finally you get to Judah.

And by the time that she arrives at Judah, it's as if at this point in time she recognizes and realizes that the birth of sons to her is probably not going to win Jacob's affections.

[16 : 32] Take a look as we move down through. Verse 34, after Simeon is born, this time my husband will be attached to me. No, it won't. Verse 35 though, this time I will praise the Lord.

In other words, she's resigned herself to the fact that the birth of these children has not, one after the other, it has not brought upon her the love and affection of her husband that she wants. And so now she simply resigns herself and says, I'll just praise the Lord because He has given me these children.

Now it's unclear from the text. The text doesn't make it crystal clear to us whether or not this is a genuine, authentic praise from her offered up to the Lord. or if this is just sort of her default response to, well, He's prospered me.

He's given me good things. And so because He's done good to me, I will offer up some praise to Him. In other words, we don't know if this is heartfelt, genuine praise that she offers up or if it's simply the response of a woman who's going to respond positively because she's been treated well by the Lord and she's been able to give birth to four sons.

We don't know. We are not given a great deal of insight beyond her longing for the affection of Jacob into her desires at this point. What we know about her so far is that she longs for the affection of her husband.

[17 : 58] That affection has been given over to her sister. And despite the birth of these four sons, she still stands without his affection. And then we come to Rachel.

Chapter 30, verse 1. When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister. Now that particular term I think describes the relationship between these sisters throughout this entire chapter.

Rachel, I believe, is envious of Leah throughout the entire story because it's not until we get to the very end that Rachel finally herself bears children for Jacob, bears a child for Jacob.

She's envious. Although she has the love and affection of Jacob, she wants that which her sister has.

And what we see throughout this entire passage is each sister desiring what the other has. Each, in a sense, having received a blessing from God, Rachel the affection of her husband, Leah many

sons born to her, but each fixated upon what the other has.

[19 : 13] Longing and desiring to have what God has blessed someone else with. Envy. In Proverbs 14, verse 30, we're told that envy brings rot into our bones.

That our bones are rotted by envy. In other words, that envy is such a poisonous, dangerous thing in our lives that it blinds us to the good that God is actually doing in our lives.

That it keeps us from enjoying all the blessings that He's given us. We do not see a picture of Leah enjoying the children that she has. Rather, we see her constantly looking at the affection that she lacks from her husband.

Nor do we see Rachel enjoying the life that she lives with her husband, having his affection and his attention all the time. Rather, we see her looking at her sister and her sister's children and longing to have what her sister has.

Envy is a deadly, dangerous thing in our lives. And throughout the lives of these two women, at least in their childbearing years as we're given a peek into those years in this chapter, throughout their lives, they allow envy to prevent them from enjoying the good blessings that they have received from the Lord, but they also allow envy to exist like a poison and like a cancer within them.

[20 : 29] Spoiling everything around them and leading them into further sin. Rachel's envy initially leads her into a sin that we have already seen within the covenant family.

Take a look back in chapter 30. First, she begins to speak to Jacob. She says, Give me children or I shall die. And Jacob, for his part, does not respond as a godly husband would.

Why would he at this point? We've already noticed that at this point in Jacob's life, he has not yet owned God as his own God. He has not yet put his faith and trust in the God of his fathers.

He still stands at a distance. So why would he respond well? His response, we see there in verse 2, 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?

Now, Jacob has part of his theology correct. In other words, he understands that in fact it is God who is sovereign. It is God in fact who has withheld from Rachel what he calls the fruit of the womb.

[21 : 43] God has done that and in that he is right. But he is wrong to move from that into a kind of fatalism that says, therefore, he has no sense of responsibility at all.

In fact, if you turn back in your Bibles just a couple of pages, just turn back to Genesis chapter 25, I want you to see in a similar situation how Jacob's father, Isaac, responded to the inability of his wife to conceive a child.

Chapter 25, verse 21, we are told, Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife because she was barren. And the Lord granted his prayer and Rebekah, his wife, conceived.

Now, I don't think that Isaac any less than Jacob understands and knows that God is sovereign over birth, life, death, and everything in between.

I don't think that he has any less of an understanding of that than Jacob has. But for Isaac, that leads and pushes Isaac into intercessory prayer on behalf of his wife to say, God, I know that you are sovereign over these things.

[22 : 56] Would you please allow her to conceive? Jacob's response is anger. Who am I? What do you want me to do? I can't do anything more than I've already done. Just talk to God about it.

This is God's issue, not mine. I don't have any say over this. A godly man would have responded by his wife by entering into and understanding her pain and her heartache and falling upon his knees and interceding to the Lord on her behalf.

But Jacob's not a godly man. He is not a man of God at this point in his life. And so his response does not prevent or even slow Rachel from barreling head on into this sin that we've already seen crop up in the covenant family.

Verse 3, Then she said, Here's my servant Bilhah. Go into her that she may give birth on my behalf that even I may have children through her. Now this seems to us like a strange event and strange details.

But this was fairly common in the ancient world. We saw this happen with Abraham and Sarah and Hagar where a woman could give to her husband her handmaid as sort of a second wife or another wife.

[24 : 12] But any children that were born to that handmaid would be counted as the children of the first wife. That was the plan that Sarah had.

And yet the plan backfired because once again she deviated from the biblical pattern. And what resulted was not this joyous reception of a child that she was able to adopt and make her own. But what resulted was more envy, more frustration, more dysfunction within the family. We'll see the same things sort of unfold here though not in exactly the same way.

But her plan is much the same as Sarah's plan. I will give him my handmaid and the children that she has will be counted as my children. And she thinks that will satisfy her and yet it does not satisfy her at all.

In fact, her servant Bilhah does conceive. She does bear a child. But as we move through the story we find that that offers no resolution.

[25 : 14] It does not even dull the envy that she has toward her sister. What it does is it increases the rivalry between the two of them.

Because when we see Leah next appear on the scene, Leah is taking a cue. Verse 9, when Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children, what's she going to do now? She's going to do the same thing.

She took her servant Zilpah, gave her to Jacob as a wife. Then Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. So the plans of these women to get what they want and to do things in their own way, no matter how far that causes them to continue to move away from God's design for marriage, their plans never actually result in them receiving that which they so long to have.

It never brings Leah the affection that she wants to have from Jacob. And even though Rachel has, in a legal sense, children of her own now, she still feels as though she is lacking.

She still envies her sister and the children that her sister was able to bear to her brother, to her husband. So when we finally come to verse 14, this I think is the high point of the story.

[26 : 33] It's where things get really weird and really strange, but it's where we're given really good insight into what's going on here. Now it's strange because there are some background issues that we don't at first glance always understand or know that are at play here.

So we're told in verse 14 that in the days of wheat harvest, Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah. Now that may seem like not a big deal to us.

It's just a sort of a weird detail to include. Mandrakes were, in fact, they grow wild. They still grow wild in the Mediterranean. These particular types of mandrakes that he found, he found while he was out in the fields farming his regular crops and he comes across these mandrakes which are a kind of leafy plant.

They release an interesting kind of odor. That's why they're easy to find and they're easy to notice. But they also have a bright yellow fruit that normally grows right in the middle of that plant.

And that fruit in that plant actually has some hallucinogenic properties to it. In other words, it is poisonous if you consume too much of it.

[27 : 44] But if you consume a little bit of it, it gives you kind of a bit of a high, you might say. And so throughout the ancient world, mandrakes were highly regarded.

There were some cults and religions where people would partake of a lot of the mandrakes so they could have these weird and strange hallucinations which they saw as visions. But for the most part, this particular plant was believed among people in the world at that time, it was believed to be a kind of cure for infertility.

In fact, even in some parts of the world today, the common name for the fruit of the mandrake is love apples. It's a strange thing.

But it was believed to be able to bring some kind of resolution if a woman was struggling with conceiving of a child. Now, obviously, we can examine it today and look at it and know that nothing that it does has anything to do with fertility.

But this was just sort of the cultural backdrop. This was just some of the beliefs that they inherited from the culture around them. So this was a common misperception of what this plant was capable of doing.

[28 : 54] So he finds mandrakes in a field and if you were an ancient Israelite reading the story, you would think, uh-oh, something's about to happen with these mandrakes. Rachel needs to get her hands on these.

And that's exactly where the story moves. He finds them and then Rachel says to her sister, please, give me some of your son's mandrakes. So there's been a rivalry going on for years at this point.

We have to say for years at the very minimum based upon the number of children born. There's been a rivalry going on for years between them and the one advantage that Leah has is that she's been able to bear children.

And now here her sister says, I need some of your son's mandrakes because they will allow me to conceive and bear a child. Leah has no reason to want to comply with that request.

And she doesn't play along. Verse 15, but she said to her, is it a small matter that you've taken away my husband? So there it is right back to the heart of it.

[30 : 06] For Leah, it is always about the fact that Rachel stole the affections of Jacob. Never mind that Leah never actually had Jacob's affection and love. In her mind, if Rachel weren't on the scene, then she would be loved by her husband.

In her mind, Rachel has stolen the love that rightly belongs to her. So she says, is it a small matter? You've taken away my husband. At this point in their lives, Jacob is apparently spending his time in Rachel's tent.

Which makes sense. She's the one that he loves. She's the one upon whom he has set his affection. And so within the family's sort of compound and collection of tents, he's staying with her. And that only causes Leah to grow more bitter. And so she says, you've already taken my husband away from me. Why in the world would I give you this fruit that my son found in the fields?

So Rachel strikes a deal. Rachel said, then he may lie with you tonight in exchange for your son's mandrakes. In other words, he can go stay in your tent. You can have them for the evening.

[31 : 10] Just give me the mandrakes because I need them in order for me to be able to have children. And so when Jacob came from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, you must come into me.

I've 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. All this is strange, but what we are really seeing at play here is both Rachel and Leah's intention and their wholehearted commitment to do things on their own terms.

Rachel, for her part, is not content to sit back and wait for God to bless her with being able to conceive a child. And she's certainly not content to accept from God the reality that He may not have it in mind that she actually bear children.

She's going to do things in her own way, strange as it may be, and sinful as her actions may be in trying to obtain the thing that she wants, and Leah, on the other hand, is willing to bargain, is willing to do anything that she can do just to gain the affection of Jacob.

Each woman continuing throughout their lives to envy what the other has and to long for what the other has and now willing to do almost anything to gain that which they most desperately want.

[32 : 32] It doesn't solve the problems. The deal that they strike doesn't solve anything. In fact, the very opposite of what Rachel wanted to happen happens. Leah conceives and bears a child and Rachel remains barren.

Despite all of her work, despite everything that she does, despite all of her trying, she remains childless. She's working and laboring for the promises of God to be fulfilled in and through her, rather than resting and waiting for God to accomplish His own plan in and through her.

Verse 19, Leah is not off the hook either. 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 born him six sons.

So she is still fixated on gaining her husband's affection and gaining all of his attention. Almost as an aside, we're told in verse 22 that afterwards she bore a daughter and called her name Dinah. But as we move forward through Genesis, we'll find that's not a minor detail that she's going to factor in the story later. Finally, in verse 22, you come to what you think might be a resolution. Then God remembered Rachel and God listened to her and opened her womb.

[33 : 58] 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.

It seems as if when we stop there and we conclude our reading there that finally, finally, Rachel has what she wants. Maybe the envy will die down.

Maybe the problems will go away. But they don't. As we continue to move through the biblical story, we see, and if you know the story of the life of Joseph, the one here born at the end of this section, we know that Joseph's life is plagued with difficulty.

Because Jacob continues to favor Rachel, and because he favors Rachel, he favors Joseph. And because he favors Joseph, then Joseph's brothers, who we've already seen born throughout this chapter, his brothers become envious of him.

and they sell him off into slavery. Tell his father that he's dead. The dysfunction that begins here in this chapter plays itself out throughout the life of Jacob, throughout the life of Leah, throughout the life of Rachel, and even throughout the lives of their children.

[35 : 15] Because they could not rest in God accomplishing his plans in his own way and in his own time. They had to work and they had to labor and they had to scheme and they had to do everything that they could think of to try to get what they wanted.

To try to get what the other had. Leah longing for the affection that Rachel had from Jacob. Rachel longing for the children that Leah had born to Jacob. And all of that envy, all of it, passed on to the next generation.

And yet, God, in his goodness and kindness, providentially has ordered and arranged for Joseph to be sold into slavery so that he might be in Egypt, so that when he arises to power and the famine comes, he can save the covenant family.

Even these weird details, even this strange family drama as we move forward through the book of Genesis and through God's plans throughout history, even all of these things are working toward God accomplishing his plans.

Which means that as we look at their lives and as we look at the details, we should look at them and see them for what they are. They are sinful decisions. It is sinful behavior.

[36 : 42] And yet, as we take a step back, we ought to praise God that he's able to work through their sinful behavior to accomplish his sovereign purposes and ultimately to bring about good into the world and for his people.

Because what's the end game here? The end game is that the seed of the woman might come into the world. The end game is that the blessing of Abraham might go to all nations through that seed. And none of that happens if these children aren't born. If these brothers don't hate one brother so that he is shipped off to Egypt.

None of that happens if the sinful envy of these women disappears. And yet, they suffer the immediate consequences for their sin.

This is the great mystery of divine providence interwoven throughout our lives with our own sin. It means that we need to repent of our sin.

[37 : 49] It means that we need to recognize our sin and turn away from it. But we also need to praise God that his plans have not been thwarted by our sins. This very sin of envy that's at the fore of this chapter, it's not a sin that is ignored in the New Testament.

It's not a sin that the apostles turn a blind eye toward as if it doesn't matter. In fact, it matters a great deal. Turn over to Galatians chapter 5. I want to show you what the apostle Paul has to say here about envy.

Galatians chapter 5 verse 26. Paul says, let us not, so the people of God, that's who he's talking to, the churches of Galatia, let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. Paul is well aware of the dangers that envy and jealousy can cause among the people of God.

That's what we're seeing in this passage in Genesis. The dangers and the damage that can be caused by envy, by jealousy.

So he says, let's not be that way. Let's not go down that route. So what route should we take instead? Look up to verse 14 in the same chapter. He says, the whole law is fulfilled in one word.

[39 : 16] You shall love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another, that's exactly what Leah and Rachel are doing. Biting and devouring one another. If you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

So Paul looks at envy and he sees it as a great danger within the body of Christ, just as it was a great danger there. And he says, rather than envy, replace it with love for one another.

In other words, love demands not that we envy what others have. Love demands that we rejoice in the blessings that others receive. Love is not consumed by jealousy.

Love is consumed by celebrating the goodness of God in the lives of those around us. And Jesus in fact says that this kind of love, he tells us in the Gospel of John, he says that this kind of love, this kind of love for one another, it's not full of backbiting, it's not full of envy and conceit, it's a love that is sacrificial toward one another.

And he says that this love, love for one another, by this all people, he says in John 13, will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

[40 : 38] Jesus has provided for us, has given to us a clear picture of what love for neighbor looks like, what love for one another looks like, as he has laid down his life for his people, and he calls us to follow him.

yes, God is able and God does accomplish his purposes in and through our sins, but he calls us to something greater.

He calls us to something better than Rachel and Leah. He calls us to better relationships within the body of Christ. He does not want us, he does not expect us, he does not hold out for us this kind of dysfunction that we see in the family of Jacob.

The body of Christ, the new covenant family of God, ought to look markedly different from this dysfunctional family of Jacob.

We ought to be a family that is not consumed with wanting what others around us have, but is consumed with praising God for his good providences in the lives of those around us.

[41 : 53] We ought to be a people who are fixated on the goodness of God in our lives and in the lives of others and who are able to praise God for the things that he withholds from us because even his withholding of those things is moving toward the accomplishment of his plans in our lives.

At the end of the day, the supreme example for us is certainly not Jacob, certainly not Leah, certainly not Rachel. Those are not the supreme examples for us. The supreme example for us is Christ himself, who loved his people with such a love that he laid down his life for us.

In fact, in the same passage that I just read from John 13, Jesus begins by saying, a new commandment I give to you that you love one another.

And that seems strange because that's not a new commandment. Jesus has already said it a few times by the time he says it here. It's found throughout the Old Testament love your neighbor or love one another.

We find this command all through the scriptures. It's not new. So why does you say it's new? A new commandment I give to you that you love one another just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

[43 : 13] It's new because now we have a picture of what it's supposed to look like. It's new because now we have seen the ultimate display of this kind of love.

the commandment is old. The clear picture of what obedience to this commandment looks like is new in the life of Jesus. Because Jacob quite frankly is through much of his life a failure.

Leah and Rachel, his wives, are consumed with envy and jealousy and they fail in their relationship with their husband and with one another. And the story of that failure tracks all the way through the Old Testament.

We do not see in the Old Testament scriptures a great and clear example of this is how you're supposed to live, this is what you should look like, what we see is this is God's standard and this is how his people continually fall short of the standard.

Until Jesus, the son of Abraham and the son of David and the true spiritual Israel comes into the world and shows us what love looks like, we don't have a clear picture and yet as new covenant followers of Christ we have a crystal clear picture of Christ being willing to lay down his life to take upon himself the punishment for our sins so that if we repent and trust in him we receive eternal life, we receive his righteousness as a free gift.

[44 : 47] It is the picture of Christ giving up all the good that he has in order to obtain and earn good things for us rather than envying what others around him have.

Jesus is willing to lay aside his privileges in order that he might gain privileges for others. And those of us who are his followers have been commanded again and again not only by Jesus but by Paul and by James love one another.

Pursue love in all of our relationships within the body of Christ. How often do we look at others within the church and we grow frustrated because we see things that they have that we think we ought to have?

Because we see blessings in their life and there's no reason why we shouldn't be able to enjoy that very blessing. Or not even within our local church but sometimes we look out beyond here and we see other churches or other Christians and we think why can't we have that?

Why don't we have those things? That's not the kind of love that Jesus has patterned for us. The kind of love that Jesus has patterned for us does not look with envy.

[46 : 06] Love does not envy, Paul says. It doesn't look with envy upon the blessings that God has given to others. Rather it looks for an opportunity to lay aside its own good and its own blessing in order to serve others.

Rachel and Leah stand for us as clear examples of how not to pursue conformity to God's will and God's ways.

Yes, we can rejoice that God worked through their sins and He accomplished His plans. And we can rejoice that God will work through our sins and He will accomplish His plans.

But just as Rachel and Leah were responsible for all their decisions and they suffered the consequences of their sinful decisions, so also we, while rejoicing in God's sovereignty, we are responsible for all of our decisions and we are to pursue love for one another, love for neighbor, and a building up within the body of Christ so that the world will look in from the outside and say, there's something different about them.

The world at the time of Rachel and Leah would not have seen anything different about them. Would have seemed almost normal. Such dysfunction among a polygamous culture would have seemed normal.

[47 : 33] And Jesus says, as the world looks at you, they should see your love for one another, and by that they will know that you are my disciples. Let's pray. Okay.