

030820 Growth Group Study

Can Children Make You Happy? Ask Leah and Rachel

Gen 29:31-30:24



Background: The subject of this week's text is children. The promise of children was a significant driving force in God's covenant to Abraham, especially when given to barren women like Sarah and Rebekah. What follows is a very surprising birth narrative of Jacob's twelve children, and with it we discover how two wounded women learn to connect with God. These two sisters give voice to the question, "Can children make you happy? At what price?" After we examine this question we will address the theme of children in the context of the New Covenant.

Sermon Text: Gen 29:31-30:24 (ESV)

I. Leah's First Four Children (31-35)

31 When the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. 32 And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, for she said, "Because the LORD has looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me." 33 She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Because the LORD has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also." And she called his name Simeon. 34 Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, "Now this time my husband will be attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." Therefore his name was called Levi. 35 And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "This time I will praise the LORD." Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she ceased bearing.

II. Fierce Competition between sisters (1-13)

A. Rachel Confronts Jacob (1-2)

1 When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister. She said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die!" 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?"

B. Rachel offers Jacob Bilhah, her maid (3-5)

3 Then she said, "Here is my servant Bilhah; go in to her, so that she may give birth on my behalf, that even I may have children through her." 4 So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife, and Jacob went in to her. 5 And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son.

C. Rachel claims the victory in the naming (6-8)

6 Then Rachel said, "God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son." Therefore she called his name Dan. 7 Rachel's servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. 8 Then Rachel said, "With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister and have prevailed." So she called his name Naphtali.

D. Leah bears through Zilpah (9-13)

9 When Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children, she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. 10 Then Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. 11 And Leah said, "Good fortune has come!" so she called his name Gad. 12 Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. 13 And Leah said, "Happy am I! For women have called me happy." So she called his name Asher.

III. Rachel Gives Up (14-24)

A. Rachel and Leah (14-15)

14 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." 15 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."

B. Leah waging love with Jacob (16-21)

16 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. 17 And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. 18 Leah said, "God has given me my wages because I gave my servant to my husband." So she called his name Issachar. 19 And Leah conceived again, and she bore Jacob a sixth son. 20 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. 21 Afterward she bore a daughter and called her name Dinah.

C. God remembers Rachel (22-24)

22 Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. 23 She conceived and bore a son and said, "God has taken away my reproach." 24 And she called his name Joseph, saying, "May the LORD add to me another son!"

Note from Shawn: I know speaking of "bearing children" can be a painful topic for many people. I am sensitive to that as we engage in questions surrounding this topic. If you have struggled/are struggling in this area, maybe the small group can be a safe place for you to share? Also, it may be helpful to remember that when Paul speaks of Abraham's children, there are times when he is speaking of "spiritual children." Although our text this week certainly speaks to bearing physical children, we can at least probe the concept of bearing spiritual children as well. With thankfulness for all of you!

Discussion Questions

1. Preparation

- a. As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out to you most?
- b. What is one thing you hoped to talk about today/tonight?
- c. What question(s) did you come away with from the sermon?

2. Sermon questions (pick 3)

- a. Do you revel in the fact that you are “fearfully and wonderfully made,” and that God’s thoughts about you are “rare and innumerable...more than the sand...so vast is their sum!” (Ps 139:17-18)?
- b. Do you identify with Leah or Rachel in your quest to find love or fulfillment? Have you been damaged by competition or comparison?
- c. Which of the children’s names resonate most within you? If you are married, how do you think your spouse might answer the question?
- d. Was there a moment in your life when, like Rachel, you found life by “letting go”?
- e. If you have physical or spiritual children, how have your children helped you understand the depths of God’s relentless grace?
- f. What has been your most fulfilling day as a parent (of physical or spiritual children)?

3. For Further Reflection

- a. We all have the great privilege of sharing our faith with the next generation. So, let’s explore this concept of “bearing spiritual children”:
 - 1. What does “bearing spiritual children” mean to you?
 - 2. Can you name your spiritual children?
 - 3. What could you do to bear more spiritual children (maybe get involved in a ministry, get training, etc)?