Loving Leah (Inspired by a sermon at BOTT 2017)

**Genesis 49:28-31**

28 All these are the twelve tribes of Israel: and this is it that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them.

29 And he charged them, and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite,

30 in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a buryingplace.

31 There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah.

The Story

- In the pages of the Genesis we see the lives of the Patriarch unfold.
  - We walk them through their various experiences
  - and we see the end of their lives.
  - However, as much as is said about them
  - there is much that is left unsaid.
  - There are stories there that are not readily obvious.
    - As a matter of fact, to get to those stories,
      - one has to have the perception
      - to read between the lines
        - and to recognize the significance
          - of sometimes isolated
          - passages of scripture.
  - This evening I want to share such a story with you.
    - It begins in the context of a very familiar tale,
      - one that you have probably heard
        - a hundred times or more.
  - The story begins with a young man
    - who, with the assistance of his mother,
      - deceived his dying father
        - and stole his brother’s birthright.
  - After he secured for himself
    - the blessing that belonged to Esau,
      - Jacob fled the land of his father
        - and went to his uncle Laban
          - in distant Mesopotamia.
  - When he arrived in that land,
    - before he ever even met up with his uncle,
      - Jacob encountered the beautiful Rachel at a well.
  - From that moment on, Jacob was

Loving Leah
- hopelessly in love with Rachel.
- He singlehandedly rolled away the stone for her,
  - so she could water her father’s flock.
- Then, in a surprisingly forward turn of events
  - the scripture says that Jacob kissed her
    - and was overcome with emotion
    - and wept.
  - Only then does he introduce himself to Rachel
    - as her father’s kinsman.

- The narrative is swift and pointed.
  - Jacob arranged to marry Rachel
    - in exchange for seven years of hard labor.
- However, the story takes a sudden
  - and unexpected turn
    - when Laban deceived Jacob
      - and gave him Leah instead of Rachel
        - on the wedding night.
  - As beautiful as Rachel was,
    - Leah was that ugly.

**Genesis 29:17**

17 *Leah was tender eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favoured.*

- Tender eyed is a translation
  - that is both polite
    - and favorable to Leah.
- The word used there
  - indicates that she was weak eyed
    - or dull eyed,
    - meaning she was unattractive.
  - She was the plain one.
    - Lets face it:
      - She was the ugly one.
- She was not the one that Jacob was in love with,
  - not the one that he had labored 7 years for.
    - Rachel had the “wow” factor
      - but Leah had the “what” factor,
        - as in what in the world
          - have you done to me?

- Jacob’s great love for Rachel
  - induced him to agree to labor
    - for another seven years

Loving Leah
• in order to receive her also as his wife.
• That sets up the conflict
  o that would forever mark
    ▪ the household of Jacob.
• There was an intense rivalry
  o between the two sisters.
    ▪ The bible mentions,
      • several times in those early years
        o that Jacob loved Rachel
          ▪ and hated Leah.
• However, the Bible says
  o that because Jacob favored Rachel,
    ▪ the Lord made Leah conceive
      • while Rachel remained childless.
• From these two women,
  o and their handmaids,
    ▪ the 12 tribes of Israel would be born.
• It was Leah who gave birth to six sons,
  o among them the two tribes
    ▪ that played the most significant roles
      • in the history of the nation of Israel.
  o The tribe of Levi
    ▪ became the tribe of the priesthood.
  o The tribe of Judah
    ▪ became the tribe of royalty
      • through which the promised seed
        o ultimately came in the person of Jesus Christ.
  o Another two sons came
    ▪ through her handmaid.
• Rachel's barrenness persisted,
  o even as her own handmaid
    ▪ gave birth to two sons.
• Rachel's womb was finally opened
  o as she gave birth first to Joseph
    ▪ then to Benjamin.
    ▪ Benjamin's birth, however,
      o was the end of Rachel's story.
• She died in childbirth
  o and was buried where she died
    ▪ at Bethlehem.
• The Bible says that Jacob set a pillar on her grave,
  o a grave marker that endured
    ▪ throughout Israel's history.
• After Rachel's death,
Leah carried on as the wife of Jacob, and the mother of his many children, living in Canaan.

The Bible does not tell the circumstances of Leah’s death. It only records that, when she died, Jacob buried her in the family plot of Abraham, in the cave of Machpelah.

**The Rest Of The Story**

- That’s the end of the story.
  - Now for the rest of the story.
- It is at the end of Jacob’s life, long after Leah’s death that we finally get some insight into the significance of Leah to Jacob.
- In his final moments, as he is preparing to leave this world, Jacob instructs his sons to bury him, not at Bethlehem, beneath the pillar, with Rachel the wife of his youth, but in the cave of Machpelah, where he buried Leah.
- In the early years of his life, in the portion that is narrated in scripture, Jacob loved Rachel and despised Leah.
- However, something incredible happened with the passing of time.
- By the end of his days, Jacob wanted to be laid to rest next to Leah, the wife of his latter years.
- Somewhere along the way Jacob learned to love Leah.
- Somewhere along the way, Jacob learned to love the ugly one, the one he never asked for, the one that was forced upon him.
- She, whom he had all but rejected, became the one that
ultimately possessed his heart.

- Somewhere along the way
  - Jacob learned the value of the ugly thing
    - that God had placed in his life.
- The greatest blessings in his life
  - came through Leah.
    - It was Leah that satisfied his heart,
    - it was Leah that made him whole again,
    - it was Leah, after the death of Rachel,
      - that loved him without holding a grudge,
        - held him
        - and healed him.
- It was Leah that was by his side
  - through the many long years that would follow.
- And ultimately, it was Leah
  - that he wanted to spend eternity with.
    - What a dramatic change in the narrative!
      - The one that was rejected
        - become the one that was favored.

- My point this evening is simple but powerful.
  - There are some things
    - that will enter your life,
      - things that are ugly,
    - things that you didn’t ask for,
      - things, perhaps, that you didn’t deserve.
- But I want to challenge you
  - not to judge those things
    - by the way they look right now.
- God has a strange way
  - of taking that which was ugly
    - and turning it into something beautiful.
  - God has a way of taking that which was hated
    - and turning it into something that is loved.

- Mark my words,
  - you better learn to love Leah
    - because God’s going to put
      - some things in your life
        - that you will never understand.
- He’s going to put you in places
  - that make no sense to you.
    - You are going to step back

Loving Leah
• and question your sanity,
  o you are going to lift your hands to heaven
    ▪ in the ultimate act of futility
  • and ask Why?
    o Why me?
    o Why here?
    o Why now?
• But listen to your pastor this evening;
  o it is not the beautiful things in your life
    ▪ that will eventually bless you.
  o It is the ugly things
    ▪ from which your greatest blessings will flow.
• Beauty will come from ashes.
  o Joy will rise from sadness.
    ▪ Wholeness will spring forth from brokenness.
  • Prosperity will be birthed
    o in seasons of great loss.

For Your Benefit
• It was Brother Tenney who said it best
  o when he said that God is more worried
    ▪ about your development
    • than your comfort.
• He's going to put you
  o into some uncomfortable places.
    ▪ He's going to subject you
    • to some uncomfortable situations.
• You are going to wake up one morning,
  o expecting to roll over
    ▪ and see your lovely Rachel,
  o only to discover
    ▪ that you've awoken next to the ugly one!
• But don't despair.
  o Leah may be unattractive on the outside
    ▪ but she is sweet and lovely on the inside.
• Scholars say that Rachel and Leah
  o are a study in contrasts.
• While Rachel possessed great beauty,
  o she had deep emotional issues.
• It was Rachel that stole the idols
  o from her father’s house
    ▪ and cultivated idolatry
    • in the house of Jacob.
• She also struggled greatly

Loving Leah
with her inability to produce children
  - to the point that it strained
    - her relationship with Jacob.
- Over time Jacob would come to appreciate
  - the plain, unattractive Leah,
    - because of the beauty of her spirit,
      - the deepness of her love
        - and the patience of her passion.
- She was willing to wait on him.
  - She was willing to win him over.
    - She was willing to love him unconditionally.
- Mark my words,
  - what appears to be a curse today,
    - will become your blessing
      - before it is finished.
- The seeds of your greatest days
  - will be planted in the shadows
    - of your darkest moments.

Personal Testimony
- The most difficult season of my life
  - was the two year period
    - between the birth of Rocklan
      - and the birth of Harrison.
- I’ve often shared that story
  - but I’ll tell it again briefly.
- Rocklan was born with an inguinal hernia.
  - Immediately after his birth,
    - we were told that he would need surgery.
- This wasn’t what we expected.
  - We had just had our first child.
    - This was supposed to be a Rachel moment
      - but somehow we woke up
        - to discover that it was Leah
          - that we had embraced,
            - not Rachel.
          - It was ugly,
            - it was unattractive.
              - It was depressing.
                - It wasn’t anything
                  - that you would ever long for.
- They did that surgery when he was only six days old.
  - We never imagined,
• in the days prior to his birth,
  • that we would have
    o to hand our baby son
      ▪ over to an anesthesiologist
    • as they put him under for surgery.

• However, that moment,
  o as devastating as it was,
    ▪ was just the beginning.
• Over the course of the next 2 years
  o Rocklan would have 5 surgeries,
    ▪ and three of them would relate
      • to the hernia problem,
        o but each of them would require us
          ▪ to hand our baby boy
            • to an anesthesiologist.
• Two year and 23 days after Rocklan was born,
  o his little brother came along.
    ▪ Once again, Rachel quickly turned into Leah.
• Harrison had a major heart defect.
  o The initial prognosis was not good,
    ▪ as a matter of fact
      • there was a better chance that he would die
        o rather than live
          ▪ through those first few hours.
• However, God answered prayer
  o and by his grace,
    ▪ the situation began to change.
• They performed a life saving surgery on Harrison
  o when he was only 6 days old
    ▪ and cautioned us
      • that several more surgeries
        o would likely follow.
• Once again, God intervened
  o and 16 years later,
    ▪ he has not yet
      • had to go under the knife again.
• I am thankful for that.
  o But let me tell you
    ▪ what else I am thankful for:
      • I am thankful for the Leah moments in my life.
• If I had it to do over again,
  o I wouldn’t change one moment.
    ▪ Through the valleys
      • and through the trials,

Loving Leah
Loving Leah

when Leah was as ugly as she could be,
  • I learned that I could trust God.

  • Somewhere along the way
    ▪ I learned to love Leah.
  • Somewhere along the way
    ▪ I learned to be thankful for Leah.

• I want tell someone in this house, tonight,
  o that you need to reevaluate your situation.
    ▪ Don’t be so quick to shun Leah.
• God has brought you to this place,
  o he has brought you to this valley,
    ▪ to this struggle
    ▪ to this ugly situation
      • for his divine purpose.
• He’s getting ready to bless you.
  o He’s getting ready to open the fountains of heaven
    ▪ and pour you out a blessing
      • that you cannot contain.

• Mark my words.
  o If you will take the time
    ▪ to look back over your life
      • you will quickly discover
  o that the parts of the story
    ▪ that you would like to leave out
      • are the parts of the story
        o that have made you who you are today.
• That trial,
  o that test,
    ▪ that deep dark season of your life,
      • that was the season
        o where God manifested his love for you
          • in the midst of an ugly situation.
• Once you look back
  o and recognize the truthfulness
    ▪ of what I’m saying,
      • you need to re-evaluate
        o your current situation.
• It is time to take another look at Leah.
  o It is time to look past
    ▪ the grim exterior of your situation
  o and see the blessing
    ▪ that is hiding in the shadows.
• God’s getting ready to bless you.
  - God’s getting ready to multiply you.
    • God’s going to turn your Leah
      • into the very love of your life!

CLOSE
• Over the years, I have picked up a saying
  - that has become such a part of my vocabulary
    • that my Mother-In-Law bought a sign for my office
      • with these words inscribed upon it:
        - It is what it is.
• However, this past week,
  - God dropped a word into my spirit,
    • quite unexpectedly.
  - He said it is what I say that it is.
    • It is not simply what it is.
      • It is not simply what it appears to be.
    • It is not to be judged
      • upon its outward appearance.
• It IS whatever God says that it is!!!
  - And that is all that it is.
    • It may be ugly.
    • It may be unattractive.
    • It may look like you’ve been wronged.
    • But hang in there.
      • It is what GOD says that it is.
• What looks like a detour,
  - what looks like a wrong turn
    • is really the most direct route
      • to the place of blessing and promise
        - that God wants to take you to.
• I’ve come to talk to some folks this evening
  - who have walked into this place
    • with Leah walking in your shadow.
  - Trouble and heartache
    • have dominated your days.
• But I’ve come to challenge you
  - to learn to love Leah.
    • It may not be what you wanted,
      • It may not be what you expected
        - but God is getting ready to bless you.
• You didn’t get here by your own hand.
  - This wasn’t your plan

Loving Leah
This wasn’t the way you wanted it.

• You thought you were chasing Rachel
  • You thought you were about
    ▪ to embrace the beautiful thing
  • But something went wrong.
    ▪ What looked like Rachel in the darkness of night
      • Turned out to be Leah.
  • Don’t despair.
    ▪ Don’t throw in the towel.
      • This isn’t the end of the story!

• The good days are coming.
  • If you will just hang in there.
    ▪ One of these days
      • you are going to learn to love Leah!