

# gods that Fail (and the only God who Satisfies)

## Part # 2 - “Liberation from the Idol of Romance”

Genesis 29:15-35

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on March 12, 2017 by Pastor Barton Priebe

### INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Please open your Bibles to Genesis 29.
- There is one theme that runs through almost every famous love song: the idea that true love will make everything OK – that true love is the key to being a fulfilled human being. If you are a young millennial today you can hear this in just about every song Taylor Swift sings:
  - Her lyrics are always expressing how she just wants a man to love her – that if she can find such love then she will be happy. Yet she is always left heartbroken when things breakup and sings, “*We are never ever getting back together.*”
- It was the same for the Gen X generation. Go back to the 90’s and consider Bryan Adam’s triple platinum Grammy winning song *Everything I Do*.
  - “*Oh - you can’t tell me it’s not worth tryin’ for  
I can’t help it – there’s nothin’ I want more  
I would fight for you – I’d lie for you  
Walk the wire for you - ya I’d die for you  
Ya know it’s true  
Everything I do - I do it for you*”
- It was the same with the Boomer generation. Go back to the 60’s. Dean Martin captured it best when he sung, “*You’re nobody till somebody loves you. . . so find somebody to love.*”
- The theme that you hear through almost all love songs is the hope that true love will fill the emptiness that we feel. It is the hope that there is one perfect person out there, that when found, who will make life complete.
  - Now the Bible celebrates romantic love as a good gift from God. But as we have seen in this series when we take a good thing, like romantic love, and elevate it to the ultimate place in our lives, we make an idol. An idol is a God-substitute. When we try to fill the emptiness of our souls with something like romance we find ourselves enslaved to the idol and dissatisfied with what it provides.
    - The gospel is the message about how God has come down in Jesus to liberate us from the false gods and fill our emptiness with Himself.
- Today we are going to show how Jesus liberates us from the idol of romance. It does not matter if you are married or single, this message is for you. It does not matter if you are young or old, male or female. This is an idol that captures almost everyone to one degree or another.
  - So once again, let’s do three things: let’s identify the idol, expose the idol, and defeat the idol.

### IDENTIFYING THE IDOL OF ROMANCE

- Today’s first heading then is **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** identifying the idol of romance. Let me show you it in Jacob and Leah’s life and then in ours. Jacob was a man who was always trying to fill his inner emptiness. Jacob had an older brother named Esau and his father loved Esau more than Jacob. Jacob deceived his blind and elderly father into giving him the blessing that was due to Esau. Esau was so angry that Jacob had to flee for his life.
  - Everything fell apart. His bank account was empty. He had no family and so he ran far away to live with, and work for, his uncle Laban. We pick up the story there. **READ 15-**

**20** - Then Laban said to Jacob, “Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?” Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah’s eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, “I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.” Laban said, “It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me.” So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

- Jacob meets Rachel who is beautiful. **READ 17** – “Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance.” Her form refers to her body and the word beautiful refers to her face. She is a knockout in every way. We also see that Jacob is in love with her to an excessive degree. We know this because seven years is far too much. Scholar John Walton says that, “*the typical bride price was thirty to forty shekels. Since a shepherds annual wage was ten shekels a year, Jacob was in fact paying a premium by working seven years.*”<sup>1</sup>
  - But Jacob wanted Rachel so badly that the seven years flew by. At the end of it we read in verse 21 that Jacob goes to Laban and says, **READ 21** - Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.” Commentators, both ancient and modern, have a hard time with this verse because it is unusually crass. Imagine going to your future father in law and saying, “Give me your daughter now because I must have sex with her.” This is not simply a man’s good desire to sleep with his wife.
    - The narrator of Genesis is trying to show us a man who is overwhelmed and controlled by sexual desire. This is how Jacob is trying to deal with the inner emptiness that results from all his failures. Having lost everything he now thinks that if he can just get Rachel then things would be right. She will fill the void.
- Leah also has great inner emptiness. Look back at verse 17. **READ 17** - Leah’s eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. Translators have a tough time with this. Literally it means that Leah had delicate or fragile eyes. That is technically correct but it misses the meaning. What is the author trying to do here? He is contrasting Leah with Rachel. Eyes, in ancient times, were the personification of beauty. This verse then is a contrast between the physical appearance of the two women.
  - Leah was unattractive. Perhaps she was cross-eyed or had a wandering eye. Although Leah was the older sister she grew up constantly being compared to her gorgeous younger sister. Her father’s greatest dilemma was how he would ever find a man who would marry Leah.
- Now how did Leah try to fill the emptiness she felt over being the not so good looking sister? She thought that if she could just get the love of a man then she would find the sense of significance she had so long desired.
  - We know this because of what she names her sons. Let’s jump ahead in the story for a minute. She does get married to Jacob but we read in verse 30 that Jacob “loved Rachel more than Leah.” Every name she gives to her sons expresses her longing for Jacob to love her. **READ 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.” Reuben is taken from a word that means ‘to see’. She hopes that having a son will cause her husband to take notice of her now.

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<sup>1</sup> John Walton, *The NIV Application Commentary – Genesis*, 586.

- **READ 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.* Simeon comes from a word meaning ‘to hear’ – maybe he will hear me now.
- It all comes to a head in verse 34. **READ 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.* Levi comes from the word meaning ‘to attach’. She believes that the only way her inner emptiness can be filled is if Jacob becomes attached to her.
  - The great irony however is that the man she hopes will fill the emptiness she feels over being the ugly sister is in love with the woman who makes her feel empty.

## JACOB AND LEAH IN MODERN TIMES

- Now some people react to the Bible and say, *“This is why I cannot stand Christianity. It is just so primitive and regressive: buying women, polyamgy...etc”*
  - Allow me to descend into sarcasm for a moment to make a point. Isn’t it great that men today no longer think that great sex with a gorgeous woman will make them feel like real men? Isn’t it great that we no longer have men who treat women as sexual objects? Isn’t it great that in our day women are so liberated that they no longer base their self-worth on their physical appearance? Isn’t it great that a woman’s looks no longer make any difference to how well she is received in society? How can we possibly say that the Bible is primitive? This is as contemporary as it gets.
- The atheist and Pulitzer Prize winner Ernest Becker writes about how modern secular people have dealt with loss of belief in God. He asks where modern people find significance when they no longer believe in God. One of the main ways is what Becker calls *“apocalyptic romance.”* In other words we look to sex and romance to give us the sense of meaning that used to come from God.
  - Talking about the modern secular person he writes: **(SHOW SLIDE 3)** *“he still needed to feel heroic, to know that his life mattered in the scheme of things...He still had to merge himself with some higher, self-absorbing meaning, in trust and gratitude...If he no longer had God, how was he to do this? One of the first ways that occurred to him...was the ‘romantic solution’...The self- glorification that he needed in his innermost nature he now looked for in his partner. The love partner becomes the divine ideal within which to fulfill one’s life. All spiritual and moral needs now become focused in one individual...in one word the love object is God.”*<sup>2</sup>
    - Isn’t this exactly where our culture has turned? True love is the thing we look to fill our inner emptiness. Jacob represents the stereotypical male who believes that great sex with a beautiful woman will fill his emptiness. Rachel represents the stereotypical female who believes that a relationship with the right man will fill her emptiness.
- So let’s bring all this together now and identify the idol. Remember that we make idols when we take a good thing and make it into an ultimate thing; when we try to fill our deepest emptiness with anything but God.
  - So what is the good thing? True love. **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** Proverbs 18:22: *“He who finds a wife finds a good thing.”* Tremper Longman writes, *“Our desire to know and be known intimately by another is not a perversion or sinful desire, but rather a God-*

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, 28.

*given human trait...the desire for relationship is not ugly. It is not a sign of weakness, but an important part of who God made us to be. In fact, fear or avoidance of relationship is an indication that something is wrong with us.*"<sup>3</sup>

- It is not idolatry to desire marriage. It is not idolatry to seek a spouse. It is not idolatry to lament being single when you want to be married.
- True love becomes an idol then when you make it the thing you live for, the driving force of your life, the thing that consumes you. We will talk to married people in a few minutes but, single people, may I speak gently with you for a moment? it is not idolatry to lament that you are not married when you earnestly desire to be married. You know that true love has become an idol if you are angry with God for not granting you a spouse. Or, if you feel like your life is only worth living if you have someone. Or, if you are willing to disobey God and pursue marriage with a non-Christian.
  - **(SHOW SLIDE 5)** So to summarize our first heading then, the good desire for true love becomes an idol when we must have it in order to have meaning, to feel significant and secure, or we disobey God in order to attain it.

## EXPOSING THE IDOL OF ROMANCE

- To keep true love from becoming an idol in our lives let's move to our second heading: **(SHOW SLIDE 6)** exposing the idol of romance.
  - **(SHOW SLIDE 7)** You see an idols power comes from the promises it makes. It promises to fill your emptiness in a way that God cannot. We greatly diminish the power of idols in our lives when expose the promises they make; when we show that their promises are lies; when we show how the gods always fail. Let's see it again in our story and then in our lives.
- Laban comes up with a plot where he tricks Jacob into marrying Leah. Jacob, the great con artist has met his match in Laban. So Jacob works the seven years and then there is a wedding.
  - Old Testament scholar Bruce Waltke tells us that, *"the Hebrew word implies a drinking feast. Jacob was probably not in control of his faculties. By befuddling Jacob with wine and using the blindness of the bridal veil and the darkness of night, Laban pulls off his deception."*<sup>4</sup>
- What irony when you think about how Jacob deceived his father and stole his brother Esau's blessing! It was Jacob who had used the darkness of his father's blindness to deceive him. Laban now uses the darkness of night to deceive Jacob. Jacob's father had reached out in the dark, thinking he was touching Esau only to be deceived into touching Jacob. Now Jacob reaches out in the dark thinking he is touching Rachel but is deceived into touching Leah. Jacob had pretended to be his older brother Esau to get what he wanted. Now it is Leah who pretends to be her younger sister Rachel to get what she wants.
  - This irony is most clear in Laban's response to Jacob. He literally says, 'It is not done in our place to set the younger before the elder.' When he said these words Jacob felt a spear run through him. For Jacob had set himself before his older brother. Laban has now reversed the trick in setting the older before the younger.
    - A man reaps what he sows. The deceiver has been deceived.
- Here is the big point: Jacob thought that if he could just get Rachel all would be well but when he woke up behold, it was Leah.

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<sup>3</sup> Dan Allender and Tremper Longman III, *Breaking the Idols of Your Heart*, 49, 51.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce Waltke, *Genesis*, 405.

- So Keller, whom I am borrowing some key ideas from today, writes, **(SHOW SLIDE 8)** *“With all due respect to this woman, it means that no matter what we put our hopes in, in the morning, it is always Leah, never Rachel.”*<sup>5</sup> The gods always promise to fill our emptiness. They promise to be Rachel. But we always wake up with Leah. The gods never deliver on their promises.
- Let’s talk to the married people for a minute. This is where so much conflict arises in marriage. You often impose god-like expectations on your spouse. But since your spouse is not a god, he or she will be crushed under the weight of your expectations and you will be left disillusioned. You thought you were going to get Rachel but you are left with Leah.
  - We see in Jacob and Leah the stereotypical male and female idolatries. It is of course an overstatement but there is enough truth in it to say that men use relationships to get sex and women use sex to get relationship. When these idols drive men and women there will always be conflict. If the man doesn’t feel like his wife is meeting his sexual needs then he can stop investing in the relationship. But if the woman feels like the man is not caring about the relationship then she will not want to have sex. This makes the man upset and so he further withdraws. Vicious cycle.
    - And so you see older men leaving their spouses for sex with younger women and you have women having affairs in a desperate search for a man who will actually love her.
- The first place you need to start with this idol is to expose its promises as lies. **(SHOW SLIDE 9)** The idol of romance promises that true love with another person will fill our emptiness. But this is a lie. The truth, as Earnest Becker writes, is that
  - **(SHOW SLIDE 10)** *“No human relationship can bear the burden of godhood...however much we may idealize and idolize [the love partner] he or she inevitably reflects earthly decay and imperfection...After all, what is it that we want when we elevate the love partner to this position? We want to be rid of our faults, of our feeling of nothingness. We want to be justified, to know our existence has not been in vain. We want redemption – nothing less. Needless to say, human partners cannot give this.”*<sup>6</sup>

## DEFEATING THE IDOL OF ROMANCE

- Once you expose the lies of the idol of romance you need to see that your inner emptiness can only be filled by God. That brings us to our third and final heading: **(SHOW SLIDE 11)** Defeating the idol of romance. For all of Leah’s problems she is the only one in this story who finds liberation.
  - You remember how the names of her first three children all revealed that she was looking to her husband to be her Saviour. But there is an obvious breakthrough with her fourth child. Look at what she names him. **READ 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.* Judah comes from the word for ‘praise’. Notice that there is no mention of her husband here. Her heart is satisfied in God.
    - But it is not just God in general. Whenever you see the word LORD in capital letters it is referring to God’s covenant name – YAHWEH. The name YAHWEH means *“the God who is with us and for us.”* Leah must have learned from Jacob

<sup>5</sup> Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, 37.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, 40.

about how the God of heaven and earth had revealed himself to their family, how he was with them and for them, how he would bring salvation to the world through them. This love liberated Leah.

- In her children's Bible, Sally Lloyd-Jones describes what happened to Leah like this: **(SHOW SLIDE 12)** *"Now when Leah knew that God loved her, in her heart, suddenly it didn't matter anymore whether her husband loved her the best, or if she was the prettiest. Someone had chosen her, someone did love her – with a Never Stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love."*<sup>7</sup>
- What happened to Leah can happen to you on a far deeper level. Think about it. What will defeat the idol of romance in your heart? What is it that your heart is so desperately searching for? True love. **(SHOW SLIDE 13)** We all want to know in the deepest part of our being that despite our ugliness we are loved with a never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever love.
  - And right here in the Leah's fourth son we learn that this love does exist. In Genesis 49 it was prophesied that through Leah's son Judah God would bring the Messiah, the true King who would capture our hearts with love.
    - And in the fullness of time God sent forth His Son. Like Leah, Jesus was unattractive. Like Leah, Jesus was despised and rejected by men. But Jesus looked upon all the ugliness of our sin and loved us as a groom loves his bride. His love is proved in that he paid the ultimate price to gain his bride. On the cross Jesus bore all our sin, all our ugliness, all our idolatry. In Jesus we are made beautiful before God. In Jesus we know that the God of heaven and earth is with us and for us.
- Tremper Longman puts it like this: **(SHOW SLIDE 14)** *"the wild news of the gospel is that we can stop running after love because we have already been grasped by the Great Lover. We have been forgiven our sins, our consistent failures to love...Jesus Christ knows our ugly side, and he loves us anyways. Instead of recoiling from us, he moves more passionately into our lives."*<sup>8</sup>
  - Husbands and wives, when you are captivated by God's love for you in Jesus it fills that deep need for true love and you are liberated from having to impose those crushing god-like expectations on your spouse.
    - Singles, when you are captivated by God's love for you in Jesus you it fills that deep need for true love and you are liberated from crushing need to be married. You can rest in God's sovereign plan and say to potential partners, ***"you may be a great person and may even turn out to be my spouse but you cannot be my life. Jesus is my life."***
- Jesus became and ugly and was rejected so that you could become beautiful – loved by God for all of eternity.

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<sup>7</sup> Sally Lloyd-Jones, *The Jesus Storybook*, 74.

<sup>8</sup> Longman, *Genesis*, 60.