

This Time I Will Praise the Lord

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Guest Speakers

By Tedd Tripp

Bible Text: Genesis 29
Preached on: Sunday, September 12, 2021

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Pastor Ty Blackburn. Dr. Tripp actually mentioned to me as you were introducing that, Ted, that's his favorite hymn and how good of the Lord to sovereignly work in such a way as to bless us with that song today. How good the Lord is.

Before I do introduce Dr. Tripp, I do want to say a word about the date, September 12, 2021. Many of you saw yesterday or read online or on television about the tributes, reminders, 20 years ago, it's hard to believe, isn't it, those of us who can remember that day, and we were talking about it yesterday and how it's so easy to remember where you were and to remember the shock to the system that it was. Everything changed and unsettled us in such a profound way. The nation was just staggered but the people of God were reminded of our hope and so I want to read a few verses from Psalm 46 and then pray for our nation, the world, but especially for God's church, that we would be people who walk in this truth. When the world is convulsing, when it appears out-of-control, we know that it's not. The Lord reigns. He's in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence.

Psalm 46,

1. God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. 2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change And though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; 3 Though its waters roar and foam, Though the mountains quake at its swelling pride. 4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, The holy dwelling places of the Most High. 5 God is in the midst of her, she will not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. 6 The nations made an uproar, the kingdoms tottered; He raised His voice, the earth melted. 7 The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our stronghold. 8 Come, behold the works of the LORD, Who has wrought desolations in the earth. 9 He makes wars to cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariots with fire. 10 "Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." 11 The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our stronghold.

How wonderful it is to serve a God who delights to be our stronghold, our refuge. He loves to help us in the day of trouble. We can run to him through Christ with great confidence no matter what happens. Nothing, even though things are so out-of-control from our vantage point, things not happening the way we planned them, completely unforeseen, unanticipated, yet God is on the throne. It's exactly what he wills and he will give us the grace when we need it.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we thank You for Your greatness, Your majesty, Your sovereign power. Lord, as we just read, You speak and the earth melts. You, Lord, are never unsettled. You are completely joyful as You are unveiling Your will each moment, each day, carrying out Your purposes, advancing Your kingdom. You're always delighting in the great works that You are doing and so we can know that, when we don't understand what's happening and we thank You that, Lord, You've given us that confidence in Your word. It is a sure foundation that we can stand on. We thank You, Father, for Your blessing upon our nation. We thank You that You did protect us from what we thought at that time might be a series of attacks that might go on for weeks or months. We thank You that You have granted relative just amazing great freedom and safety to us but we thank You also that You used that to awaken many people to the reality of eternity, and we pray, Father, that You would continue to advance Your kingdom in the hearts of Your people and more and more unbelievers would become followers of Christ. We pray that You would help us to shine like lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation and that the glory of Christ would be seen in the lives of people who know, as we just sang, Lord, that all that really satisfies is Christ and that the joy of who we are in Jesus would so emanate from our lives the way that we live that people would be drawn to You. Continue to advance Your kingdom, Lord, in our lives for Your glory. We do pray that You'll also bless our leaders, bless them with wisdom, bless those who protect us, military, law enforcement, we thank You for the heroic acts that were done by police officers, fire personnel, emergency medical people that day, and we thank You, Lord, that You have granted so many blessings through Your common grace. Father, we pray that You would be glorified in this service. Remind us today that You are everything that we need and help us to live for Your glory. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

We had a wonderful conference this week Friday and Saturday at Shadowbrook and I really wish I had pressed harder on it. I feel like there should have been more of us there, so I'm going to let the Lord deal with you on that but I think a lot more of you should have been there than were. The good news is God is gracious and one of the things that we're going to be able to do is send you a link so that you can watch the material going forward because we videoed it all. But it was really such a blessing and as a person whose kids are grown now, I was so helped. Patti and I were talking about that, how enriching it was for us not only to think about the possibility as we look forward to the future of being grandparents and there was a lot of wisdom just knowing how to parent and how to help, where to step back and let our kids do what they're supposed to do with their kids, but also just the focus on the heart and it just was so applicable to life and I'm so grateful for what God did.

So anyway, I encourage you when you see that link come out, don't be thinking, "I already know this," because even if you do, you need to be reminded and if you don't think you need to be reminded, you need to be humbled because you're proud. Read 2 Peter 2:1, actually 11 to 14. Peter says, "I will not hesitate to continually remind you of the things I've already told you about." Why does he do that? Because we need to be reminded and if you think you don't need to be reminded, like I said, you need to be humbled because we all need to be reminded. But anyway, it's a great blessing so I say that just look forward to that opportunity that's going to be coming.

And I also want to say a word of thanks to the people who made it happen. We had a number of folks from Providence that at the last minute, even, came to the rescue. We needed a number of people, I think it was like 14 or 15 people to do childcare and we lost 8 of them on Thursday night, the 8 from Shadowbrook, because they had a COVID exposure. And so we had to scramble on Friday and Bethany White and many of you showed up and did that. Thank you so much. You were a great blessing to so many folks because you did that. Anyway, it was a wonderful weekend. I look forward to seeing that again, watching that again myself.

Now I have the opportunity to introduce Dr. Tedd Tripp. Jonathan and I and many of you had the blessing of going to South Africa in 2018 for a ACBC Africa trip, and Dr. Tripp was the main speaker at the ACBC Africa conference. He and his wife, Margie, were both there and Jonathan and I got to spend a little time driving around Cape Town with them. They had a car and the way it worked out, we got to spend time with them and what a blessing it was to fellowship with Dr. Tripp and Margie that day.

So we really have a special place in our hearts for them but Dr. Tripp's ministry has been such a blessing and the book "Shepherding a Child's Heart" many of you have already read but I want to just share with you to those of you who don't know him, some things about Dr. Tripp. Dr. Tedd Tripp is Senior Pastor Emeritus of Grace Fellowship Church in Hazelton, PA. He pastored as the Senior Pastor before becoming Pastor Emeritus for 29 years. He and Margie have been married since 1968. They have three adult children, nine grandchildren. He's a graduate of Geneva College Philadelphia Theological Seminary and Westminster Theological Seminary earning a D.Min. in pastoral counseling. He's the author of "Shepherding a Child's Heart" which the conference was about shepherding a child's heart. Tremendous book on child-rearing and the godly way of doing that. Tedd and Margie also founded a Christian school when they were shepherding that church in Hazelton, Immanuel Christian School. For over a decade Tedd served as a counselor in the Lehigh Valley office of the Christian Counseling and Education Foundation, and since 1994 Tedd has maintained an extensive ministry as a conference speaker and presenter of "Shepherding a Child's Heart" seminars. His books are used around the world. He shared with us last night that "Shepherding" has been translated into 37 languages, "Shepherding a Child's Heart" in 37 languages.

One of the things I found out this weekend as well which means so much to us here at Providence, is that Tedd was baptized by Wayne Mack in his church and Dr. Mack's, like

he's an honorary member/pastor here at Providence. He's the family. So when you're family to him, you're family here and so we're delighted to have you, brother, to bring the word of God to us this morning and we look forward to what he's going to do.

Tedd Tripp. I know that Wayne and Carol have waxed eloquent many times with Margie and me about this church and how much they appreciate it, so it's been a joy for us to be here and a joy to renew acquaintance with Ty and after meeting them three years ago in South Africa.

So I'm thankful for the opportunity to be able to open God's word for you this morning and I want to turn you to an Old Testament passage, a familiar story that you probably learned in Sunday school in Genesis 29, and it's the story of Jacob and Rachel and Leah, and we want to look at this story together. I'm not going to read the passage but I hear you turning and I'm so glad you have your Bibles with you. I think one of the best arguments for not having pew Bibles is that it encourages people to carry their own, so I'm glad that you have your Bibles with you. If you have your Bible open in front of you, I will reference the passage as I preach through it so you'll know where we are in the Bible. I want to look at this passage with you and let me just pray again asking for God to be with us.

We come, dear Lord, again acknowledging our need of You, acknowledging our need of Your grace, acknowledging our need of Your Spirit to work in us to illuminate us and to give us understanding and insight into Your word. We pray that we would be pliable before the word of God, that we would be people who are quick to listen, that we would receive God's word not as the words of man but as it indeed is, as the word of God, and we pray that You would help us to understand how this passage brings us to Christ and how it maps onto our life and our life experience as Your children. So we pray, Lord, for Your grace to be with us in these few minutes that we have together. We ask for this for Christ's glory. Amen.

Well, Jacob, of course, is one of those very familiar figures in the Bible. He is one of the patriarchs. He's one of those Bible figures that's easy for us to identify with. You have to feel sorry for Jacob in some ways. He grew up without the love of his father. He was doted on by his mother, Rebekah, who spoiled him. His father, Isaac, largely ignored him and poured himself into his unworthy son, Esau, and even in this story, Jacob is cheated by his uncle Laban, he's forced to work twice as long as he agreed to for his wife, Rachel, and he's one of these figures that we can relate to because the things that he wants always seem to be just out of reach for him.

In some ways, we look at Jacob and, you know, we can't stand him. We feel judgmental of him. He's a flawed man. He's dishonest. He's conniving. He's cruel. He is willing to lie. He is willing to cheat. He's willing to blaspheme. He will do whatever it takes to get what he wants. There's this kind of desperate vulnerability to Jacob. He's the kind of person really in many ways we can relate to because some of those flaws we see in ourselves as well and so we can identify so often with Jacob.

There are three things I have for you in this passage this morning. I want to look at the background of the story to kind of set the stage for the story, remind you of some of the background before we get to this chapter and some of the background in this chapter, and then we will look at the story itself, and then we'll draw the lessons that we can draw from this story. But in terms of setting the stage, remember Jacob has already received revelation from God that God in great mercy has given him. This is very important background for us to remember. Remember in chapter 28, Jacob is fleeing his brother, Esau, who is angry with him because he's stolen the birthright and the blessing of the firstborn. And so Jacob is fleeing, he's fleeing for his life, and he has this amazing dream. He lies down in the middle of nowhere. He has nothing with him. He pillows his head on a rock and that night God comes to Jacob with covenant promises and with a revelation to Jacob that is just astounding. God doesn't come with conditions, he comes with his promise of covenant blessing. He says, "I'm going to bless you. I'm going to give you descendants. I'm going to give you a land. I'm going to bless the world through you. I'm going to make you a blessing. I'm going to be with you. I'm going to protect you, and I'm going to bring you back home."

Marvelous blessing and it's the first time that God speaks to Jacob in the story and God reveals himself to Jacob, and Jacob's response in chapter 20 is a very interesting response because it's a very conditional response. Jacob says, "If You will be with me on my journey, and if You will watch over me, and if You will give me food to eat, and if You will give me clothes to wear, and if You will protect me, and if You will bring me back home again, then of all I have I will give you a tenth." Notice the very conditional response, "If, if, if, if, if, then." And I point this out because God coming to Jacob at Bethel is just a display of incredible grace and mercy and goodness of God, and the stairway to heaven where the angel of God ascend and descend in Jacob's dream, that stairway is not a ladder we climb to get to God, God comes down that stairway to Jacob. And he comes to Jacob in the midst of his neediness and his extremity and his fears, and God comes to him with marvelous revelation and with covenant promises, "I am going to be with you." He's really extending the covenant that has already been given to Abraham and to Isaac. He's extending it to Jacob and he's saying, "Those covenant promises that I made to your grandfather and to your father are going to be yours as well." And undeserved grace and goodness in God.

Now Jacob is a lot like you and me. We have revelations of God's truth that come to us. God comes to us with his word and we gain insight into his word, and we have those wonderful experiences where we see new things and we rejoice in those things that we've seen but the implications of it don't all sink down to us at once, and we don't necessarily grasp it all or understand it all, that God is at work, God's at work in us, moving us in the direction of loving him, moving us in the direction of seeing that he is enough for us. But it doesn't all happen at once. It's a process and Jacob is in that process and the fact there's so many conditions and his response to God shows that he doesn't fully understand yet what God has said. But he's in process. God is working on him and Jacob is going to disappoint us as the story goes on. He even disappoints us in this chapter but God is working on him, God is working in him, and we might say Jacob is a lot like you and me because God comes to us, he reveals himself to us but we don't always make all the

connections we ought to make. We still blunder along and sometimes we're faithless and unbelieving and God in mercy just continues with us because he doesn't give up on us, and he continues to put us in situations and extremities, he continues to use people and circumstances in our lives to loosen our grip on this world, to help us to see more of his glory and to move us to love God and to see the futility of putting hope in anything other than God and the necessity of resting in God and God alone. Jacob is in that process of growth, that same process of growth you and I are in right now where we have insight into God's word and truth and we love God and we want God, and yet we don't always make all the connections we ought to make.

So that's part of the background. Jacob has received revelation from God, there's a lot of room for him to grow, he's going to grow but he's in this process. The other background that I would just mention is in the first half of this chapter Jacob arrives at Paddan-aram at the ancestral home of his mother and he finds the family of Laban. In many ways, the story has echoes of the earlier story of the servant of Abraham going to the same place, the same well actually, and finding Rebekah and taking her home to be a wife for Isaac. And the well is where Jacob connects with the rest of the clan, and he's arrived safely to his ancestral home and he meets his one true love, he meets Rachel there, and she takes him home to her father and they make all the connections and realize the father, his uncle, and his uncle Laban kisses him and embraces him and says to him, "You are my own flesh and blood." So we have that background: God's working in Jacob, he makes his way fleeing his brother's wrath to the ancestral home and connects with his uncle.

Now as we look at the story, Jacob stays there for a month. He's working for his uncle. His uncle is a herdsman and he's working for his uncle and his uncle Laban is a cagey man. He's observing Jacob. He's taking his measure. He's trying to figure out whether or not this guy is someone I want to have around, and after a month, he concludes that he is someone I want to have around, and so he comes to him and he says in verse 15, "Just because you are my relative, it doesn't mean you should work for nothing. Tell me what your wages should be." Now we know that Jacob is a slippery fellow. Jacob is a conniver, he's a cheater, he's a conman, but as a conman he's up against his match with uncle Laban because Uncle Laban is just as crooked as he is, only he's been doing it longer.

And so Jacob is up against his match and Laban very cleverly asks this very open-ended question. He begins this negotiation by asking, "Tell me what you're worth." Don't you hate a question like that when you apply for a job? When you get ready to talk about money, they say, "Ah, what do you think you ought to get paid for this job?" You think, "Now if I go too high, they're going to think forget it, he wants too much money. He'll never be satisfied with what we can pay him." If you go too low, you might end up working for less than you would have gotten. So, you know, he asked him this very open-ended question. It's a question that's really designed to get Jacob to expose himself without Laban exposing himself at all. Clever man.

And verse 18 tells us that Jacob was head-over-heels in love with Rachel. He was smitten. Apparently she was a stunning beauty and it tells us in verse 17 that Rachel was lovely in form and beautiful. This woman was desirable. She had a shapely appearance.

She had the kind of appearance that aroused desires in men. She had a face to match. And it's very interesting that the text identifies both of those qualities. She is lovely in form and she's beautiful. And remember who Jacob is. Jacob is this neglected son. He's this son who never had the love of his father. He's the son whose father never expressed a lot of interest in him. He was momma's boy. He was doted on by a mother. The father loved Esau, he liked Esau's manly ways and Esau's hunting and Esau's outdoors-man character, and Isaac liked Esau and delighted in Esau. And so now Jacob has stolen the blessing of the firstborn. He's fleeing the wrath of his brother. His brother, Esau, has consoled himself in the lost blessing of the firstborn by saying, "As soon as our father dies, I'll kill him." So he's consoling himself by promising himself, "I'm going to kill him." And he flees. He's full of longings. He believes his longings can be met in a relationship with Rachel, "If I had Rachel, life would be good, I would be happy, I would be satisfied." So we have this man full of longings and he thinks that Rachel will be the one.

Now Jacob, of course, is not the only person that's ever done this. One of the places we turn to in our emptiness and in our brokenness as needy people is we turn to relationships. It's really a reflection of the great exchange that Paul talked about in Romans 1. He said people exchange the truth for a lie and they find something in the creation which they will worship and serve, something in the creation that will give them joy and happiness, something in the creation that I will live for and that will give me satisfaction. And one of the places we go for fulfillment and joy when we're looking to the created order to satisfy us is to relationships, "If I had someone who loved me. If I had someone who is beautiful and delightful and tender and affectionate and attractive and understanding, of course, forgiving of my flaws." If we had someone like that, if I had someone like that, I could find joy and I could find delight. I would be fulfilled, that will open up life for me. That's where Jacob is. He's in love. Did you ever think about the fact that being in love is often more about me than it is about the object of my love? I have someone who fulfills me, who makes me happy, who will bring me joy, who will give me satisfaction, who will complete me.

So Laban opens this negotiation by asking Jacob to expose his desires and he says, "What do you think you're worth? What should your wages be?" Verse 18 tells us Jacob was in love with Rachel and he said, "I will work for you for seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel." Now as soon as Laban hears this, Laban knows that he has Jacob right where he wants him because Jacob is not driving a hard bargain. Jacob is offering a dowry that is 4-5 times larger than the customary dowry and Laban realizes that, "I have him right where I want him. He will do anything." And of course, you know in a negotiation, you lose your leverage when the person with whom you're negotiating realizes that you will do anything you have to do to get what you want. You lose all leverage.

Margie and I like to go antique shopping. We live in Pennsylvania, we go down to the Amish area around Lancaster and we walk in and out of these dusty barns full of antiques and we try to find things that we would enjoy having. And we've been married for 53 years and so, you know, we have very similar tastes by now and we'll find something that we both like and Margie will say, "Ask him what he wants for that." And so I'll look at

the object and in kind of an off-handed way I'll say to the shopkeeper, "What do you want for that?" He says, "\$300." Margie says, "That's not bad! I thought it would be twice that much." I've lost the ability to negotiate here, haven't I, because my wife says it's worth twice as much as he's asking and, you know, I'm going to pay \$300 because I can't negotiate.

Now Laban is so clever, you know, he sets Jacob up and he never really consummates the deal. He doesn't say, "Done! Let's shake hands on it." Or, you know, "I'll have my people get back to your people with the contract and we'll settle this out." But he makes this kind of weird statement. He says, verse 19, it says, "It's better that I give her to you than someone else. Stay with me." He seems to agree. Jacob wants to believe that Laban has agreed to this bargain, that they have a deal.

So in verse 20 he tells us that Jacob served for seven years to get Rachel but they seemed like only a few days because of his love for her. Here's a man in love. He goes out, these men are herdsmen and he goes out into the fields every day. He's out in the hot sun. He's out in all kinds of weather and he's herding the flocks and he goes home tired every night, but the days pass by and they seem like only a few days because he's counting down the day until he can come to Rachel and he can consummate his love for her.

And verse 21 gives us an indication of his passionate desires for her. He says, "Give me my wife so I can lie with her." Now that verse doesn't seem very shocking to us because we live in the 21st century and people talk very freely in our culture about sexual desire and sexual passions, and so we're not too shocked by this verse. But in the history of commentary on Genesis 29, many commentators have expressed surprise at the rawness of Jacob's statement to Laban and it sounds so much like he's just saying, "Give her to me because I want her. I want to have her." So it seems like this needy hurting man has vested a great deal of hope in being able to satisfy himself with Rachel and finally having Rachel, and doesn't sound much like he's saying to Laban, "Boy, I've been waiting for the opportunity for us to be together and to have a life together of companionship and fellowship and joy with one another." But it almost is like he wants to possess her and he wants to satisfy his desires and passions.

Well, Laban has a wedding party. All the people in the community in the area around are invited to the party. You can imagine the scene, Laban's a wealthy man in the community, he throws a big party for the wedding of his daughter. There's food and there's drink and the party goes on, people enjoy themselves into the evening, and in the evening Jacob takes his very heavily veiled wife into his tent. There are no lights, what he has in mind doesn't require lights. He holds her, he loves her throughout the night, "Oh Rachel, O Rachel, my love. O Rachel, I have longed for this day. Oh, my darling Rachel." They drift off to sleep.

Verse 25 says when morning came, there was Leah, and Jacob goes to Laban in a rage. He says, "What is this," verse 25, "What is this you've done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me? You cheated me! You knew I was serving you for Rachel, what kind of a man are you? I can't believe that you did this to me! Why

did you deceive me like this?" And you have to wonder when the irony of this question might have begun to occur to Jacob; it was the same question his father had, "Why have you done this? Why have you deceived me?" And Laban's answer must have just exploded in Jacob's conscience when Laban said to him, "In our custom around here, we don't prefer the younger over the elder." And surely by then the pieces would have fallen into place and Jacob would have realized that Laban has done to him exactly what he did to his father, that under the cover of the darkness of Isaac's blindness, he reached out and he touched someone who wasn't the person he thought he was touching.

There's an old medieval rabbi who makes commentary on this passage and he makes the observation that, he imagines a conversation that could have taken place between Jacob and Leah that morning when Jacob is reproving Leah and he says to her, "You deceived me! I called out to you in the darkness and you responded as if you were Rachel!" And Leah responds to him by saying, "Your father called out to you in the darkness and you responded as if you were Esau."

Well, Laban quiets down his rage with the promise of Rachel. He says, "Finish this week with this one and I'll give you the younger one also in return for another seven years' work." So Jacob did that. He finished the week, the bridal week with Leah, and after that Laban gave him his daughter Rachel and he had to work another seven years to work off that debt, and the passage says Jacob lay with Rachel and he loved Rachel more than Leah.

Well, what are the things we could take away from this story? There's a line in this story that resonates very powerfully. It's in verse 25: when the morning came, there was Leah. That statement is far more profound than just an expression of shock and surprise and disappointment when in the morning Jacob discovered that the woman he had been holding throughout the night was Leah and not Rachel. Jacob had placed all of his hopes of joy, all of his hopes of blessedness, all of his hopes of having a good life, of lasting and enduring satisfaction and delight, he had placed all of his hopes of joy on Rachel and in the morning it was Leah.

And of course, the pursuit of one true love is not the only way we do that, is it? There are scores of ways that we do that. It's what we do sometimes when we think, "I'm going to go to graduate school. I'm going to get another degree. When I get this degree, opportunities are going to be opened to me that would never be opened to me otherwise and life will begin to take shape and it'll be good." Or we think, "This house, this house has always been so crowded and the neighbors have been so difficult, but this new house, this new house is the house we always wanted." And we think for years, "I had a job, I was thankful for a job, the money was okay, but this new job, oh man, this new job is the job I've dreamed for! I can't believe it, I'm going to get paid for doing something I love to do!" Or we think, "If only I had a husband. If only I had a wife, then my life would have joy." Or, "If only we could have children. If we could have children, we'd feel like our marriage was complete." Or maybe when we're older we think, "If only the kids would move out and get a house of their own."

There's a cosmic truth here and if we're going to live lives of wisdom, we've got to get ahold of this truth: in the morning it's always Leah. Those things we put our hope in, those things we think will give us satisfaction and joy never fulfill. They don't have the capacity to fulfill. Derek Kidner in his commentary on this passage, he says, "In the morning, behold it was Leah, is a miniature of all of our disillusionment from the garden of Eden onward."

I was teaching this in the church, the last series I taught actually before I retired from ministry was in the book of Genesis and I taught this sermon and a lady came to me afterwards and she said, "Weight loss. Weight loss. Weight loss was my Rachel. I thought if I could lose 50 pounds, if I could lose 50 pounds, if I could fit into all those clothes that have been hanging in the closets all these years that I couldn't bear to give up but I knew I couldn't possibly wear, if I could get back into that wardrobe again, if I could get rid of these over-sized, plus-sized things I've been wearing, if I lost 50 pounds, life would come together, life would be happy, I would have joy." And she said, "I lost 50 pounds and in the morning it was Leah."

It's always Leah in the morning because those things don't have the capacity to satisfy us and no one ever said it better than C. S. Lewis in his chapter on hope. He says, "Most people if they really learn to look into their own hearts would know that they want and want acutely something that cannot be had in this world. There are all sorts of things in the world that offer to give it to you but they never keep their promise. The longings arise up in us when we first fall in love, or first think of some foreign country, or first take up some subject that intrigues us, our longings that no marriage, no travel, no learning can truly satisfy. I'm not speaking of what would ordinarily be unsuccessful marriages or failures of holidays and so on, I'm speaking of the very best possible ones. There's always something we grasp at, there's something in that first moment of longing but it fades in the reality. The scenery has been excellent, it turned out to be a good job, the spouse was a good spouse, but it evaded us. In the morning it is always Leah."

That's one of the first lessons we want to carry away from this passage but the second lesson is actually the corollary, it's the flipside of that coin, it's the realization that it is only God who will satisfy our deepest longings and our deepest needs. We're made for God. We're made for God and as thankful as we are for the things in the created order that God gives us to enjoy because he's a God of magnanimity and generosity toward us, the things in this life that we enjoy do not have the capacity to give us lasting satisfaction. Our satisfaction can be found in God and in God alone, and ultimately the other things will not satisfy.

You know, in the Sunday school versions, I mean, most of us learned this story in Sunday school, didn't we? And in the Sunday school versions of this story, Leah is always the forgotten one. We don't think about Leah, but we actually know quite a bit about Leah that we can extrapolate from what we are told about her and her sister in this text because in verse 17 there's a comparison between Leah and her younger beautiful sister Rachel. It says, "Leah had weak eyes but Rachel was lovely in form and beautiful." Now obviously the point of the comparison is not visual acuity. It's not, you know, Leah had weak eyes

but Rachel could see for two miles. That's not the point. The point of the comparison is beauty. There was something about Leah's eyes that spoiled her beauty. We don't know what it was. Maybe they protruded too much in the eye socket. Maybe they didn't track together. Or maybe there was a filminess over the eye. We don't know, but there was something about her eyes that made her unattractive.

Of course, beauty is in the eyes and Rachel was beautiful and you can imagine Leah's life, can't you? If you think about that, think about Leah's life. She grew up in the shadow of a younger sister who was a ravishing beauty. She grew up always hearing the comments of commendation directed to her sister. "Oh, these are your girls? Oh, that little one's a cutey! You're going to have to watch her around the boys." That was Leah's life. The comments of praise were always for Rachel. Rachel was the one that got all the attention, and even after she got married, she got married and a week later Rachel moved in and once again she's under the shadow of her sister. Can you imagine being Leah in this marriage? Can you imagine being married to someone and knowing the person to whom I'm married doesn't want me, doesn't love me?

We're told in verse 30, "Jacob lay with Rachel and he loved Rachel." So now she's married. Leah's marriage, she has a husband she's always wanted but he doesn't want her and she's still living in Rachel's shadow. She's a forgotten woman. Jacob sleeps with her sometimes but he loves Rachel. Leah's the invisible one. She's the one that can be in the room and no one notices she's there. She can leave the room and no one notices that she left. She's forgotten but it's so sweet in this story, she's not forgotten by God. It says in verse 31, "When the LORD saw that Leah was not loved, He opened her womb."

And the next few verses are really heart-rending if you think about them because they tell us about Leah becoming pregnant and having son after son after son, and when she names her sons, she gives them names that reflect her longings for her husband. So the first son who is born is Reuben which means "sees," and she thinks, "Now that I've given him a son, maybe my husband will see me." The next one that is born she names Simeon which means "hears." "Maybe now that I've given him a son, he will hear me." And if you think I'm reading too much into this, she tells us what she's doing. When the third one is born, Levi is born, she says, "Maybe now at last my husband will become attached to me now that I've given him three sons." So we have this poor unloved woman who longs to be loved by her husband and she becomes this dutiful wife who gives him son after son, and the name she gives these sons reflect her longings for her husband.

It's interesting, she names these sons names that reflect longings that wives have for their husbands. A wife wants to be seen. She wants to be noticed. It doesn't matter how long you're married, men, she still wants to be noticed. My wife will come to me sometimes and she'll say, "Do you like my hair?" I think it's the same hair you've had for the last 53 years but she's done something different with it, she's arranged it in a different way and she wants me to notice that she's arranged it in a different way. And I'm always very proud of myself when I notice before she asks. A wife wants to be seen. A wife wants to be heard. She wants to know that when I talk to my husband over the breakfast table, he puts his phone down and stops looking at news services and he looks at me, and hears

what I say and it matters to him. A wife wants to be attached to her husband. She doesn't want them just living in two different orbits and kind of colliding together occasionally. She wants to be joined together. She wants to have a sense that his life is my life and my life is his life; and he's always with me even when he's not physically with me, I'm in his thoughts and he's attached to me.

So she gives these names that reflect ways that a wife longs for her husband. Between sons 3 and 4, something very marvelous happens to Leah. She's been looking for Jacob to give her significance all these years. She's actually been doing the same thing with Jacob that Jacob had done with Rachel. For Leah it was the love of Jacob. For Jacob it was the trophy wife, that's what he wanted. Leah wanted the love of Jacob but she kept thinking, "If I give him sons, he will love me." But between sons 3 and 4, she realizes that, "Jacob will never give me the longings of my heart. Jacob will never satisfy me but the Lord will." And when she conceived, verse 35 says, "she conceived again and she gave birth to a son and she said, 'This time,'" that's in contrast to the names she gave the previous ones, "'This time I will praise the LORD.'" And she does something very remarkable at this point, she takes the deepest longings of her heart away from Jacob and she places them on God and she says, "I'm not looking for Jacob to satisfy my deepest longings, I'm looking to God to satisfy my longings."

And here's what I want to know, I want you to think about what are the deepest longings of your heart? What are the longings that you carry with you? What are the lesser things that you think will give you joy that ultimately will not satisfy? What are the lesser things that you need to take your hopes off of those things and place them on God where they belong? What are you longing for? What are you thinking about when you think, "My life would not have value unless I have this"? Because brothers and sisters, let's face this reality: Christian people, Christian people that are worshiping in solid churches like this one where they've come to hear God's word and to praise God and they've come with sincerity of heart and they love God and they want God, and yet Christian people often live in chronic dissatisfaction over life and over the way life has fallen out, dissatisfaction over things that always seem to be a little bit out of reach for them, things, temporal things. They might even be good things but they think, "If I had that, then I would have joy," and so they live all the while, I mean, on the one hand they know that only God will satisfy their deepest need. There's no one in this room who just had that thought come to you as an epiphany as I said it today. You've known that all along but you don't always live there, do you? Sometimes you live with chronic dissatisfaction over things in your life that you're not happy with. "This kitchen, this kitchen is so old. Look at the door of this oven, it's falling off. I have to just prop it up every time I try to bake a cake. I hate this house. This job, I dread Mondays. I don't even want to go to work." And we live with chronic dissatisfaction with things in our lives and we think somehow if those circumstantial things in our lives could be changed, if we could somehow have these longings of our hearts, life would be good and we would have joy, and God is nowhere in that picture. And the reality is what we've sung this morning in singing in both of those hymns, you know, The Sands of Time, I was thinking the things that we long for the most are found in God and ultimately those streams of knowing God and loving God and delighting in God that we have tasted on this earth, and we've all tasted those things, we

will drink of more deeply throughout eternity. The joys of eternity will not be an oven where the door doesn't fall off, it'll be being in the presence of God, to behold the face of the Savior, to love him, to be overwhelmed with his incredible goodness and mercy and beauty. So I want you to ask yourself what are those things, what are those things that create chronic dissatisfaction in me? What are the longings that I think about that I think will give me joy if somehow I had them? "I need a new truck. I need a new truck, this truck is falling apart." I might need a new truck but that truck will never give me joy. It will never give me satisfaction.

Leah learned the one lesson that we should take away from this passage, it's only God who will satisfy our deepest longings. He's the one that will meet and supply our every need. He's the one that will compass our lives with blessing. The one true love you long for is not another person, it's God, and Leah embraced that and she said, "This time I will praise the LORD."

You know, if you read the Bible, if you read the Old Testament, I've been studying the Old Testament and working on a book that I hope someday I bring to fruition about some of the examples of parenting in the Old Testament, but if you study the Old Testament, you don't find stories of noble people who are living lives of virtue that we all ought to go out and emulate. You look at the stories of the patriarchs in the Old Testament and you see flawed people, you see people like the ones in this passage who don't always get it right. And if your approach to Christianity is somehow God's at the top of this staircase to heaven and I'm going to climb up there... I remember learning a song when I was in Sunday school and it was all upside-down and backwards. It was a horrible song but we loved the motions. "I am climbing Jacob's ladder, I'm getting higher and higher." You know, as though Christianity is about me climbing up to God and doing better and better, and I'll finally get there when I get good enough. And if that's your approach to Christian faith, these Old Testament narratives will be very unsatisfying to you because you don't understand this story unless you understand that God came to a woman who was nobody, nobody wanted, and he showed her incredible grace and incredible mercy.

Rachel probably didn't know but, of course, the writer of the book of Genesis knew that Judah, this son whose name means "praise," "This time I will praise the LORD," Judah was in the line of the Messiah. Remember when Jacob is blessing his sons in Genesis 49, he says, "Judah, your brothers will praise you. Your hands will be on the neck of your enemies. Your father's sons will bow down to you. The scepter will not depart from Judah nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until he comes to whom it belongs, and the obedience of the nations is his." God looked down on these two women, the one woman who had the golden life and the woman who nobody wanted, and he chose that woman who was unwanted and unlovely, he chose her to be in the line of the Messiah, or the Messiah would come in her line more properly stated. I mean, the Lord saw that Leah was not loved and the Lord said, "I love Leah." And God is the bridegroom that she always wanted.

Why does Leah and not Rachel become the mother in the line of Christ? Is it just that God roots for the underdog? No. Leah's a picture of grace. She's a picture of mercy. She's

a picture of how God works. God doesn't come to earth saying, "I'm the God of the strong. I'm the God of the clever. I'm the God of those who get their act together, who obey My rules and jump through My hoops and climb the ladder and ascend into My presence." God comes down the ladder into our world, into our fallenness, into our brokenness. He doesn't just stand up off in heaven saying, "Hey you down there, get your act together." He comes to dwell with us. He comes to live in flesh like yours and mine. He comes to live in a broken world, our broken world, a world in which he is subject to all the struggles that we are subject to, and all the temptations, and we know without sin, but he was made like that in order that he might be our Redeemer. That's what Hebrews 2:17 and 18 says, "Because He was made like His brothers in every way so that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He's able to help us when we are tempted."

God comes into our world, he comes to us, he comes to us with grace and mercy and he gives us the deepest longings of our hearts because the deepest longings of your heart are not for another person or a better oven or a nicer house or a better career, you're made for God and he gives us himself. He gives us the greatest gift we can receive. He says, "I will dwell with you. I will be your God and you will be My people." He comes into our world.

You know, I don't know you as a group of people but I would be surprised if there's not someone here under the sound of my voice who has never come to faith in Jesus Christ, who's never repented and believed, who's never embraced Christ as their Savior, and I want to encourage you that if you're weak and needy and sinful and you know that you are in need of a Savior, he's the Savior of every sinner who will ever come to him. And he will not only save you, as glorious as that is, and give you the hope of glory and the promise of that everlasting rest in his presence that we sang about in our first hymn this morning, but he will be the bridegroom you always needed and he will be the one who loves you, and in him you'll find your all-in-all.

Let's pray together.

We come to You, Lord, with gratitude that You've given us these stories, these narratives, narratives about people that we can relate to, people that we can understand, people that have longings that we understand who tried to satisfy those longings in ways that were futile even as we have done. So we come, Lord, turning away from all of that effort to somehow make our lives work for ourselves, and we come casting ourselves on Your mercy as the willing, able, powerful Savior who is all that we need. And we pray that You would remind us each day of our lives that we are complete in Christ and that even as we enjoy the blessings of this life, the homes we enjoy and the relationships we enjoy and the preciousness of our spouses and our children, our neighbors, we pray, Lord, that in all those blessings that You so richly bestow upon us, our joy would not terminate on the blessing but rather on the blesser, not on the gift but on the giver, and that we would embrace the One who gives every good and perfect gift, and we would find Him to be enough for us. We pray this for His great glory. Amen.